

HIKING AND TREKKING IN THE JAPAN ALPS AND MOUNT FUJI



About the Authors

Tom Fay is the lead author of *Hiking and Trekking in the Japan Alps and Mount Fuji*. He is a British writer and teacher based in Osaka, and has been living in Japan for well over a decade. Growing up in the hills of North Wales, the mountains of Snowdonia were his first outdoor 'love', and he still returns there year after year. He has since hiked and climbed in many places including Scotland, Iceland, the Himalayas, China, South Korea, New Zealand and throughout every corner of Japan.

Tom writes mainly about travel and the outdoors for a variety of publications and media outlets, and is the author of a travel guidebook called *Must-See Japan*. He is a member of the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild.

Check out Tom's website – www.thomasfay.com – for more information.

Wes Lang has been endlessly exploring Japan's mountains since relocating to the country in 2001. In 2008 he became the first American (and one of only a handful of foreigners) to climb the *Nihon Hyakumeizan*, Japan's '100 Famous Mountains'. He has since gone on to complete the *Kansai Hyakumeizan* (100 mountains of the Kansai region) and is currently climbing the highest mountain in each of Japan's 47 prefectures.

He is the founder of 'Hiking in Japan' – <https://japanhike.wordpress.com> – a website providing comprehensive hiking information for the *Hyakumeizan* and beyond. His travels have taken him to the mountains of South Korea, Taiwan, New Zealand and throughout the US.

Wes lives in Osaka with his Japanese wife and young daughter.

HIKING AND TREKKING IN THE JAPAN ALPS AND MOUNT FUJI

NORTHERN, CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ALPS

by Tom Fay and Wes Lang

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
OXENHOLME ROAD, KENDAL, CUMBRIA LA9 7RL
www.cicerone.co.uk

© Tom Fay and Wes Lang 2019
First edition 2019
ISBN: 978 1 85284 947 4

Printed in China on behalf of Latitude Press Ltd
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
All photographs are by the authors unless otherwise stated.



Route mapping by Lovell Johns www.lovelljohns.com
Contains OpenStreetMap.org data © OpenStreetMap
contributors, CC-BY-SA. NASA relief data courtesy of ESRI

*In memory of Michal Vojta (1986-2016),
for showing us how to dream in clouds.
'There is nothing better than waking up on top of the mountain.'*

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/947/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

Register your book: To sign up to receive free updates, special offers and GPX files where available, register your book at www.cicerone.co.uk.

Front cover: Admiring the view from the summit of Mt Tsurugi-dake in the North Alps (Trek 2, Stage2)

CONTENTS

Map key	9
Overview map	10
INTRODUCTION	13
Preparations and practicalities	15
When to go	15
Getting to Japan	16
Getting around Japan	16
Rail passes	20
Accommodation	22
Mountain huts and camping	24
Food and drink	26
Hot springs	28
Money	29
Communications	30
Language	31
Tourist information offices	32
What to take	32
Luggage forwarding	34
Maps and GPS	35
Waymarking	36
The typical hiking day	36
Mountain etiquette	36
Health and safety	37
Emergencies	40
Using this guide	41
All about the Japan Alps and Mt Fuji	43
Location and climate	43
Geology and landscape	44
Plants and wildlife	45
History of hiking in Japan	48
THE NORTH (KITA) ALPS	51
Hakuba Area	54
Walk 1 Mt Shirouma-dake	56
Trek 1 Mt Shirouma-dake and Hakuba-Yari Onsen	66
Tateyama Area	80
Walk 2 Mt Tateyama	83

Walk 3	Mt Oku-dainichi-dake	89
Trek 2	Mt Tsurugi-dake	94
Trek 3	North Alps traverse.	108
Hotaka Area		136
Walk 4	Mt Yake-dake	140
Walk 5	Mt Nishiho-Doppyō	146
Trek 4	Mt Oku-Hotaka-dake and Karasawa Cirque	151
Trek 5	Mt Yari-ga-take	167
Trek 6	Mt Chō-ga-take and Mt Jōnen-dake	182
Trek 7	Mt Kasa-ga-take	193
Norikura Area		203
Walk 6	Mt Norikura-dake.	205
THE CENTRAL (CHŪŌ) ALPS		209
Walk 7	Mt Kiso-koma-ga-take	213
Trek 8	Central Alps traverse.	217
THE SOUTH (MINAMI) ALPS		229
North Area		233
Walk 8	Mt Kai-koma-ga-take	235
Walk 9	Mt Senjō-ga-take	241
Trek 9	Mt Kita-dake	245
Trek 10	Mt Hō-ō.	255
South Area		265
Trek 11	Mt Arakawa-Higashidake (Mt Warusawa-dake) and Mt Akaishi-dake	267
Trek 12	Mt Kamikōchi-dake and Mt Hijiri-dake	279
Trek 13	South Alps traverse.	288
MT FUJI		321
Walk 10	Mt Fuji – Yoshida route.	332
Walk 11	Mt Fuji – Subashiri route	337
Walk 12	Mt Fuji – Gotemba route	342
Walk 13	Mt Fuji – Fujinomiya route.	347
Walk 14	Mt Kuro-dake.	351
Appendix A	Route summary table – walks	360
Appendix B	Route summary table – treks	362
Appendix C	Mountain huts.	367
Appendix D	Glossary	382
Appendix E	Useful contacts and further resources	388
Appendix F	Further reading	391

Mt Warusawa (Trek 11, Stage 2)



Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:
raise both arms
above head to
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:
raise one arm
above head, extend
other arm downward



Emergency telephone numbers

The standard emergency number in Japan is 110 for the police; they can then connect you to the ambulance, fire or mountain rescue services. Or dial 119 for the ambulance/fire service.

If you have trouble communicating then ring the Japan Helpline on 0570-000-911, a 24/7 emergency assistance service.

Weather reports

For up-to-date forecasts check www.jma.go.jp (Japan Meteorological Agency) or www.accuweather.com.

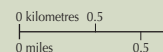
Symbols used on route maps

	route
	alternative route
	start/alternative start point
	finish/alternative finish point
	start/finish & alternative point
	route direction
	snowfield
	woodland/marshland
	urban areas
	station/railway
	peak
	manned/unmanned mountain hut
	campsite
	building
	col or saddle
	bridge
	water feature
	viewpoint
	bus stop/parking
	other feature

Relief in metres

3800–4000	
3600–3800	
3400–3600	
3200–3400	
3000–3200	
2800–3000	
2600–2800	
2400–2600	
2200–2400	
2000–2200	
1800–2000	
1600–1800	
1400–1600	
1200–1400	
1000–1200	
800–1000	
600–800	
400–600	
200–400	
0–200	

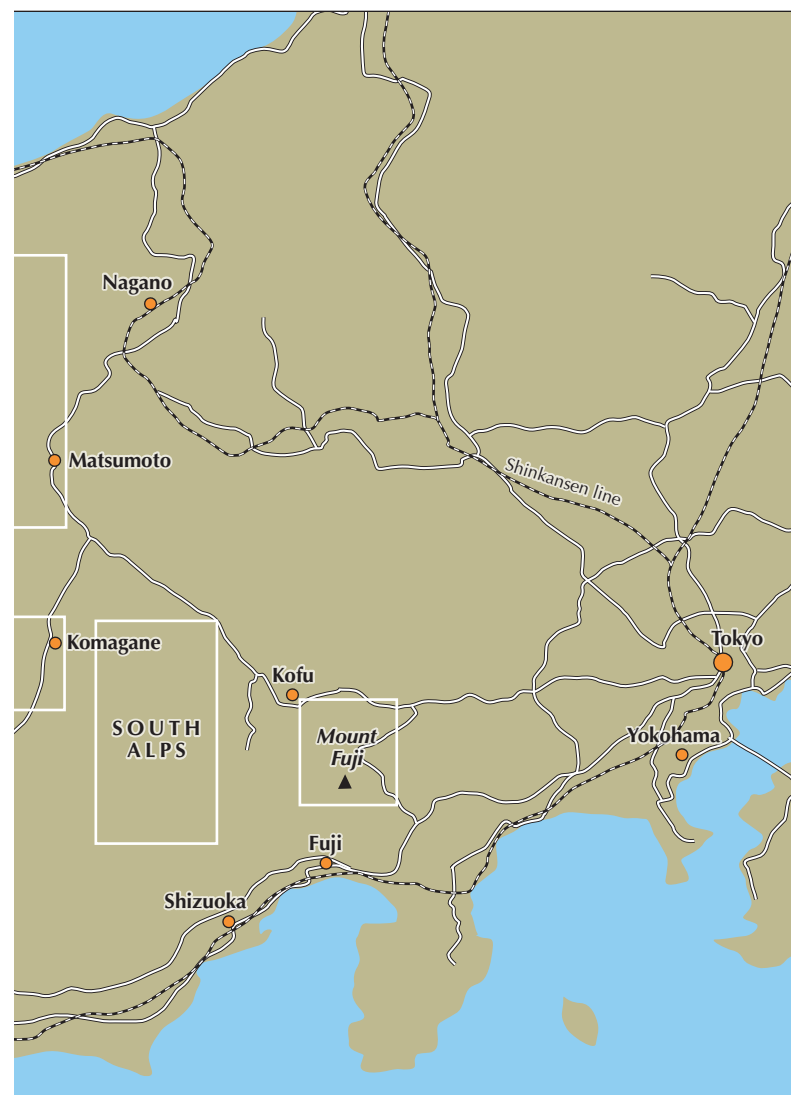
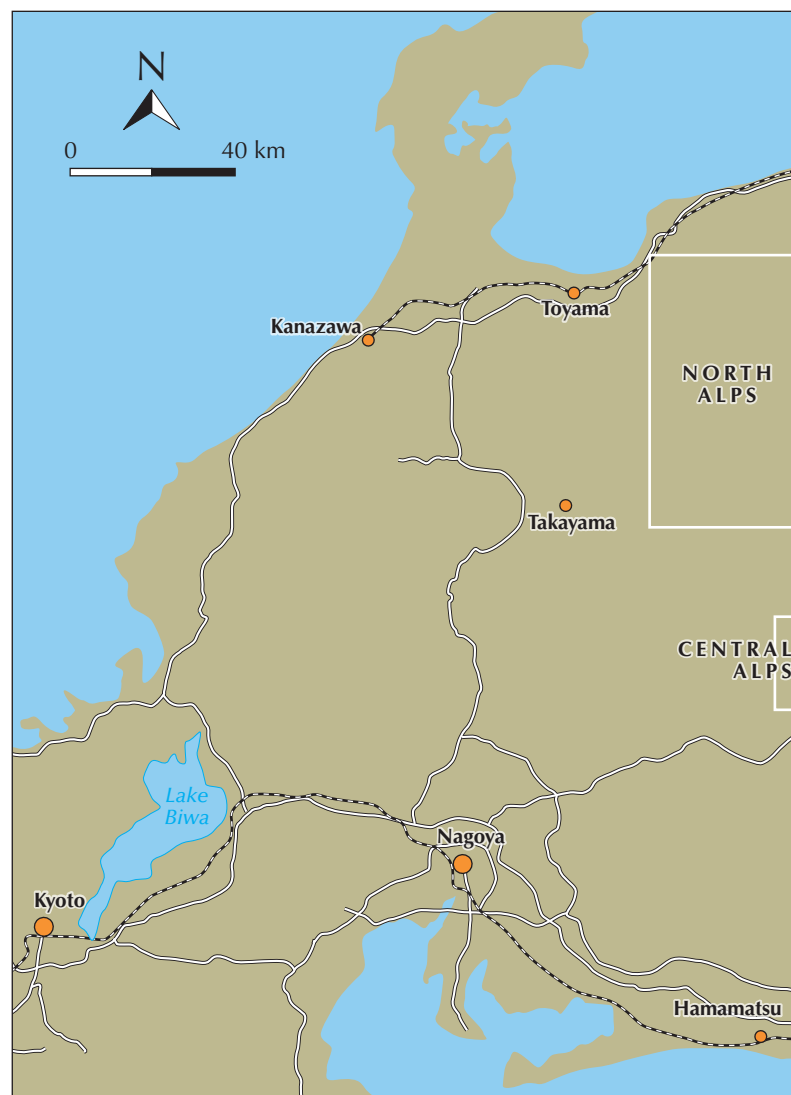
SCALE: 1:50,000



Contour lines are
drawn at 25m intervals
and highlighted at
100m intervals.

GPX files

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded for free at www.cicerone.co.uk/947/GPX.



Heading towards Tateyama from the Murodō bus terminal (Trek 3, Stage 1)



INTRODUCTION

Splendid views from the summit of Mt Yake-dake down towards Kamikōchi and a snow-capped Mt Hotaka (Walk 4)



Gazing south as the sky slowly fills with warm hues of orange and yellow, the distant but instantly recognisable peak of Mt Yari-ga-take pierces the crisp air like a jaunty church spire on a frosty morning. Apart from faint birdsong in the depths of the valleys and the sound of the wind as it rushes between rocks, all is silent. Down below, two sprightly 60-somethings are slowly hauling themselves up to this exposed promontory, while far away the hulking giants of the South Alps are silhouetted in the early morning sun. Beyond them, the unmistakable conical form of Fuji-san looms over all the land.

This is a sight at odds with the image of Japan as a country of cutting-edge

technology, bullet trains and endless urban sprawl – yet such natural beauty is easy to find in the wild alpine high country of central Honshu. The huge mountain ranges which cut across Japan's main island from north to south are collectively referred to as the Japan Alps, and they offer a wealth of hiking and camping opportunities among some of Japan's most spectacular scenery, ranging from easy day-hikes to challenging multi-day treks. An extensive network of mountain huts service all of the trails, and with excellent bus and train links to most of the trailheads it has never been easier for visitors to explore Japan's most ruggedly beautiful regions.

The Japan Alps, or Japanese Alps (Nihon Arupusu 日本アルプス in Japanese) are a series of large mountain ranges which bisect the main island of Honshu, spanning across the centre of the country from the Sea of Japan coast in the north to the Pacific Ocean in the south. They are divided into three main ranges; the North Alps (or Kita Arupusu 北アルプス), the Central Alps (Chūō Arupusu 中央アルプス) and the South Alps (Minami Arupusu 南アルプス), all of which are home to some of the biggest mountains in the country, including 20 peaks above the 3000m mark.

Standing 50km to the east of the South Alps, imposing and alone, lies Mt Fuji or Fuji-san 富士山, the tallest mountain in Japan and a technically active stratovolcano which rises to an impressive height of 3776m. The almost perfectly symmetrical conical shape

and frequently snow-capped summit has made Mt Fuji a symbol of Japan and one of the most iconic mountains in the world, and so it holds a special place in the hearts of the many Japanese and foreign visitors who come to view, photograph or climb it. The climbing season is short however, and despite its enormous popularity among people of all ages (every year up to 300,000 people attempt to reach the summit in the summer) it is not a mountain to be taken lightly. But it is an achievable goal for anyone who wishes to stand at the highest point in Japan.

This guidebook contains a variety of walks and treks in these four regions, from easy afternoon hikes to gruelling multi-day treks and climbs in high alpine terrain, so there should be something for everyone with an interest in experiencing Japan's great outdoors.

PREPARATIONS AND PRACTICALITIES

WHEN TO GO

Most of the hikes in this book are intended for the summer and early autumn hiking season, although trails and some huts in the Japan Alps open from around 'golden week' in early May, through until the beginning of November. Mt Fuji's climbing season is limited to July, August and a week or two either side of this. During the summer holidays (20 July to 31 August) trails and huts are at their busiest, and public buses to trailheads usually increase in frequency, with some of the seasonal ones only operational at this time.

The Japan Alps are likely to still be very snowy earlier in the season, so if you don't have the skills and equipment for walking on snow and ice,

wait until July onwards when most of the snow will have melted. June is the rainy season, but it can be a quiet and pleasant time to hike if the forecast is good, as the temperatures are a bit more comfortable than the oppressive heat and humidity of the summer. July and August are hot and sticky even in the mountains, although at heights over 2000m temperatures are cooler, and summits can be cold. Thunderstorms are common in the afternoons too. Be careful of typhoons from mid July to mid October. Late September to early November is a good time to hike, with cooler temperatures and a chance of seeing the stunning autumn colours – but check hut details carefully as many close by the end of October.

A wintery view of the Nishi-Hotaka ridgeline from Maruyama (Walk 5)



WALK 1

Mt Shirouma-dake 白馬岳

Start/finish	Sarukura 猿倉
Alternative start/finish	Upper ropeway station, Tsugaike Nature Park 桐池自然園
Distance	14km (8½ miles) or 18km (11 miles) via Hakuba Ōike
Total ascent/descent	1700m (5580ft) or 1080m (3550ft) via Hakuba Ōike
Grade	2
Time	9hr 30min (return) or 12hr (return) via Hakuba Ōike
Terrain	Gravel track and rocky path up the valley, followed by a long, relatively steep climb on snow/ice (simple crampons recommended). Rough rocky trails near Shirouma's summit.
Access	Buses from JR Hakuba Station to Sarukura daily from early July until end of August, otherwise only on weekends and holidays from Golden Week (late April) until mid October; journey time 30min, first bus from 5.55am. See www.alpico.co.jp/access/hakuba/sarukura (Japanese) for bus schedule. Taxis take 25min from Hakuba to Sarukura. Parking spaces at Sarukura trailhead. For Tsugaike, see below.
Accommodation	Huts and camping near the trailhead and below Mt Shirouma's summit
Facilities	Water, food and toilets at huts. Restaurant at Hakuba-sansō hut. Medical clinics at summit huts during height of summer.
When to go	Early July to early October are the best times to climb; lots of snow before this

Mt Shirouma-dake (2932m) is the northernmost and highest peak in the Hakuba region, and is well known for its year-round snowfields and beautiful alpine scenery. The name means 'white horse mountain', possibly due to the shape of the long lingering snow patches on its upper slopes. The mountain is frequently enveloped in clouds, and tends to take the brunt of the weather fronts that come rolling in from Siberia and pick up moisture as they cross the Sea of Japan. This results in huge dumps of snow in the winter, although most of the main trails are clear by early July. The most popular approach is from the east via the Daisekkei ('the great snow valley'), a long glacial valley where snow remains throughout the year. The huts near

the summit are some of the largest in Japan, with capacity for over 1000 hikers, but despite the mountain's popularity (particularly in August) the setting still feels grand and remote.

The Daisekkei is a relatively easy climb, although simple four-point crampons are highly recommended to avoid slipping (they can be bought for a very reasonable price from Hakuba-jiri-goya hut). Landslides and crevasses can occur along the Daisekkei, but officials regularly check and mark the best course up the snow valley, so stick to the main route for safety. Beware of rockfall from the steep valley sides (the snowfield is littered with rocks and boulders) and be alert at all times.

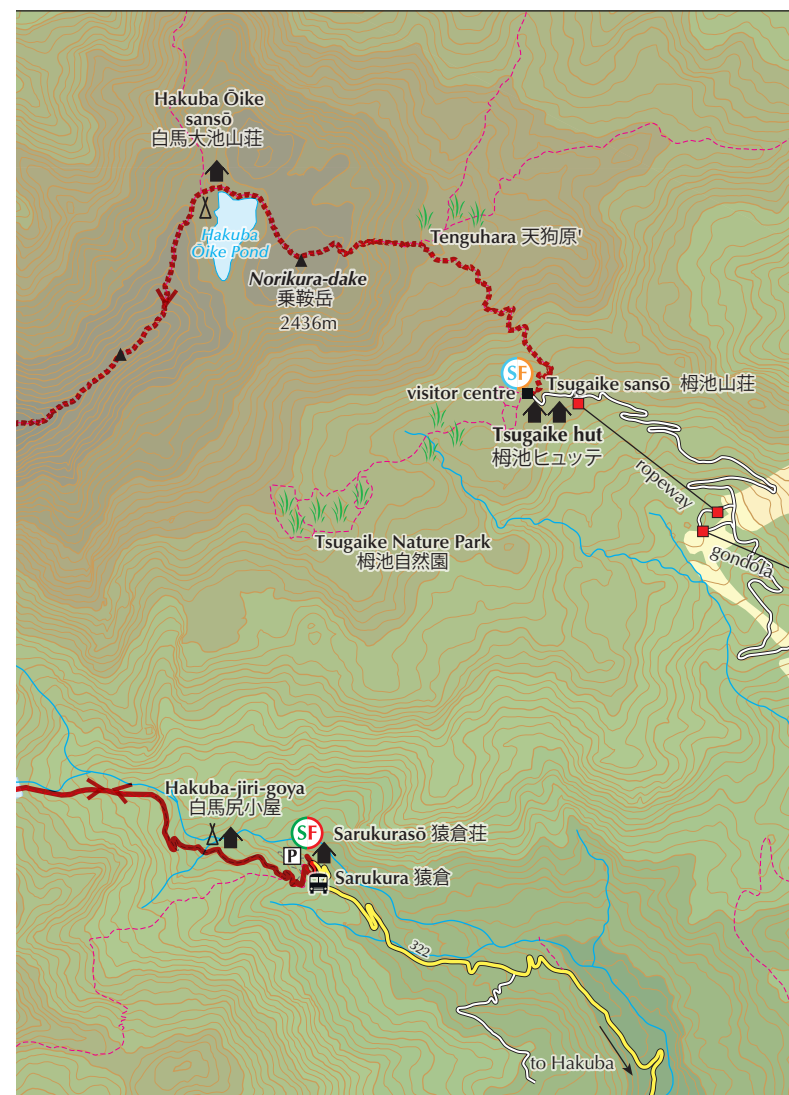
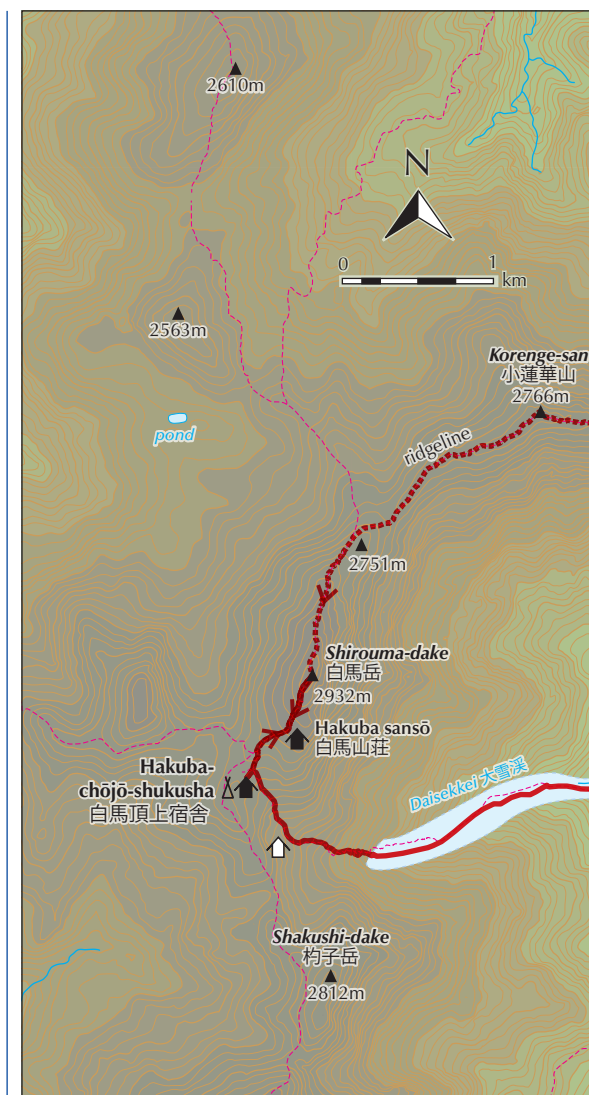
With good fitness and an early start it is easily possible to do the Daisekkei route as a day-hike, but many people like to split it over two days to enjoy the wonderful scenery at a more leisurely pace.

The trail starts to the left of the **Sarukurasō hut** 猿倉荘 and leads into the forest. Gently climb over rocky and sometimes muddy ground to meet a gravel track in about 5min. Turn left and follow the track as it winds up the valley along a slight incline, using wooden boards to ford a stream that falls into the river far below and to the right. ▶

There are good views of Mt Shirouma and a huge concrete dam on the other side of the valley.



Sarukurasō hut at the Mt Shirouma trailhead





The path leading to Hakuba-jiri-goya (hut)

Cross another small stream and continue along the gravel track to its end. After climbing wooden steps that cut through thick undergrowth you'll soon arrive at a plank bridge to cross a small gushing stream. Follow more wooden steps and then a stony path, and cross another narrow stream. Continue up stony steps to arrive at a clearing in front of the two huts of **Hakuba-jiri-goya** 白馬尻小屋. Maps indicate 1hr to get here, but it can be done much quicker if you're fit.

The hut also sells simple crampons if you need them.

The lower hut is where the reception and **shop** is; the other one is only for staying guests. The clearing serves as the **camping spot** and has great views of the rocky riverbed leading up the valley. ◀

Ascend the stone steps next to the signboards and to the right of the huts. (The signs have lots of information in Japanese about the snow conditions further up the valley.) Cross a small stream and climb wooden steps, then follow the stony path up through the undergrowth to emerge at the foot of the famous **Daisekkei** 大雪渓, or 'great snow valley'.

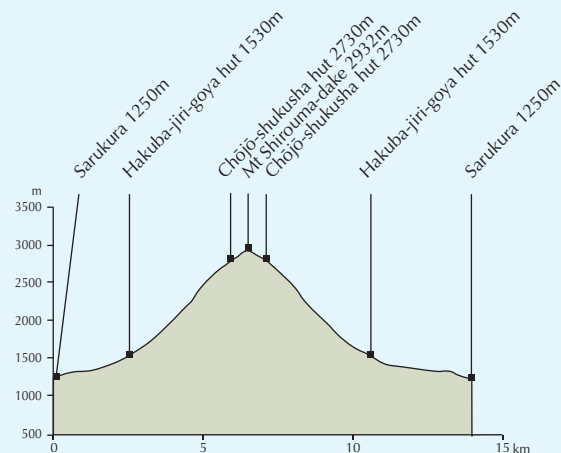
Depending on the time of year and how much snow remains, you can either follow the path directly onto the snow or ascend the rocky trail up the left side of the valley

for a short while. Cracks and crevasses can cause alterations to the snow route many times during the season, but the well-trodden and clearly marked path is usually obvious and generally sticks close to the left side of the valley. Rocks of all sizes litter the snowfield, so pay attention to your surroundings in case of rockfall. From the hut it can take around 2hr of steady climbing to reach the top end of the snowfield.

TRAVERSING THE DAISEKKEI

Most people wear crampons for this part of the route, as the surface can be more like ice than snow after repeated melting and freezing. It is also deceptively steep in places (often only noticed when looking back down the valley), and is very occasionally closed off if the snow conditions are considered too dangerous or if the risk of rockfall is high.

Leave the snow on the right side of the snowfield and follow a stony and steep path up the valley side. Yellow paint marks show the way across loose scree and between large boulders, and to the left torrents of water disappear into dark



Approaching the top of the Daisekkei



The crumbling stony turrets of Mt Shakushi-dake 杓子岳 loom above to the left.

snow tunnels at the crevassed top end of the snowfield. Hop over rocks and carefully traverse narrow wooden planks to cross a cascading river which can flow heavily depending on conditions. On the other side, follow a stony path which twists and turns up the now much greener hillside, and enjoy the spectacular views back down the valley. ◀

Climbing steadily, pass a huge brown-coloured boulder lodged halfway up a rocky gully where rotting snow clings to the steep walls, before drifting left and scrambling over rocks and past lush patches of yellow mountain violets. Clamber across an area of rocky streams to reach flatter ground and then follow the path through head-high foliage to reach a tiny **emergency hut** nestled below a big rock.

The path is less steep now and follows a rocky course uphill through glorious meadows of long grass and colourful alpine flowers. After passing a large sign with lots of Japanese writing below a rocky outcrop, climb over boulders and sturdy wooden stairs and follow the rocky path all the way up to the **Hakuba-chōjō-shukusha hut** 白馬頂上宿舎, which can be reached about 1hr 30min–2hr after leaving the snowfield.

There is a rocky **campground** directly behind the **hut**. Ascend the stony path to the right which leads to the even bigger **Hakuba sansō hut** 白馬山荘 in about 15min.

Hakuba sansō hut is one of the largest in the Alps and it sits high on the grassy and windswept slopes below Shirouma's summit. From the top of the steps, the building directly ahead is the main reception, the building to the right is called 'Skyplaza Hakuba' スカイプラザ白馬 and serves as a **shop** and **restaurant**, and the impressive long building to the left has sleeping space for hundreds of hikers.

To continue, head uphill on the stony path behind the buildings to reach the summit of **Mt Shirouma-dake** 白馬岳 (2932m) in 10min. ▶ The panoramic views from the summit are outstanding on sunny days. To return to the **Sarukurasō hut** 猿倉荘, descend the mountain by the same route in about 3½–4hr.

Alternative approach via Hakuba Ōike ('big pond') 白馬大池

This is a scenic and popular, but longer approach to Mt Shirouma, avoiding the climb up the Daisekkei snowfield. Starting from the ropeway station at 1850m, the trail crosses wetlands and high alpine meadows before arriving at Hakuba Ōike, a large picturesque pond in a wonderful mountainous setting, then continues along the ridge to the summit. This 9km (5½ miles) route is a bit too long to do as a there-and-back day-hike as it takes roughly 7hr one way with 1080m (3550ft) of ascent, so it's best to stay at a hut overnight or camp. It is also easy to combine with the previous Daisekkei route for an enjoyable two-day hike starting and ending at Hakuba Station with no backtracking.

Tsugaike Kōgen can be reached by bus from JR Hakuba Station in 25min; see www.alpico.co.jp/access/hakuba/tsugaike (Japanese) for the bus timetable. From Tsugaike Kōgen the Tsugaike Panorama Way (杓池パノラマウエイ) whisks hikers up the mountain via a combination of gondola and ropeway in 40min. See www.tsugaike.gr.jp/english for details. Parking is also available at Tsugaike Kōgen.

Exit the upper **ropeway station** and follow the paved road towards **Tsugaike Nature Park** 杓池自然園. There are

About halfway along the path just off to the right is a relief of Teiitsu Matsuzawa, a local man who founded the first mountain hut here in 1906.

pleasant marshland nature trails leading west, but take the path immediately next to the visitor centre marked by a brown sign 登山道入口. Enter woodland and climb steadily, over rocks in places, passing birch trees and then going up a series of zigzags. After reaching a flat marshland area called **Tenguhara** 天狗原 (about 1hr), follow the trail across wooden boardwalks and through low forest. Ignore the junction leading north for Kazafuki Ōike 風吹大池 and begin climbing the rocky trail towards and over a snowfield that often lingers well into August to reach the top of **Mt Hakuba Norikura-dake** 白馬乗鞍岳 (2436m), marked by a summit post and large stone cairn.

The rocky path descends very gradually to the north shore of **Hakuba Ōike** (meaning 'Hakuba big pond', although it could easily be called a lake), which is famed for its beautiful reflections. Follow the path as it skirts the water's edge around to **Hakuba Ōike sansō** 白馬大池山荘, a cosy **hut** on the pond's northwest side and about 3hr from the trailhead. (Its **campground** is in a nice spot down by the pond, where purple primulas and yellow and white Aleutian avens bloom close by.)

The summit of
Mt Shirouma



Mt Shirouma's
unmistakable
summit plinth

From the hut, ascend the path up the ridge, keeping an eye open for rock ptarmigan (*raichō* in Japanese), often spotted among the creeping pine on these slopes. Follow the ridgeline which is dotted with flowers and offers fine views of the Daisekkei snow valley far below, and reach the stony summit of **Mt Korenge-san** 小蓮華山 (2766m) in around 2hr.

Continue west for 30min along a trail with great views of the nearby peaks, and then ignore the trail coming in from the right. Follow the bare rocky ridge south, staying away from the cliffs that drop away to the east, to arrive at the summit of **Mt Shirouma-dake** 白馬岳 (2932m) in 1hr. A descent via the same route takes about 5hr, and the **ropeway** usually operates until just after 4pm (varies by season, check the schedule beforehand).