

Railroad Geotourism in Itoigawa Global Geopark, Part 1: JR Oito Line

MIYAJIMA, Hiroshi^{1*}, TAKENOUCHI, Ko¹, IBARAKI, Yousuke¹

¹Fossa Magna Museum

Earth science from the railroad train window

"The earth science from the railroad train window" of Japan originated 70 years ago by Tetsugoro Wakimizu. He wrote "Nature which was seen from the train window, Tokaido" (1942) and "Nature which was seen from the train window, San-yodo" (1944) which explained geology, geography, soil, agriculture, etc. which are visible from a railroad train window.

Rail road and Itoigawa Global Geopark

In the Itoigawa Global Geopark (IGGP), the railroad is regarded as a means to study and enjoy a geopark instead of a mere transportation device. IGGP has many inheritances related to a railroad. The steam locomotive Kurohime-go in front of Fossa Magna Museum was used till 1982 with the narrow-gauge railway for conveyance from the Japanese acid clay factory to Itoigawa Station. The brick made about 100 years ago in Itoigawa was used for the bridge pier of Hokuriku Line, the tunnel, etc. The brick garage was built at Itoigawa Station in 1912. Although remained as a landmark of Itoigawa Station till 2010, also regrettably, it was removed by Hokuriku Shinkansen construction. In order to use for the new Itoigawa station building to be opened in the spring of 2015, a part of brick garage is cut off and saved.

About Oito Line

JR Oito Line is a railroad which connects 105.4 km from Itoigawa Station to Matsumoto Station. Although between Itoigawa Station and Nechi Station was opened for traffic in 1934 and it was extended to Kotaki Station next year, it was in 1957 to have been opened for traffic between Kotaki Station and Nakatsuchi Station for steep geographical feature. In IGGP, the Oito Line is geosite called "the Himekawa gorge (Oito Line) Geosite". In this geosite, calm geotour of an average of 35 km/h can be enjoyed for 20.4 km from Itoigawa Station to Hiraiwa Station for entrainment time about 35 minutes.

The Oito Line is mostly parallel with Itoigawa Shizuoka Tectonic Line, Himekawa River, and the salt trail. The north Alps of the Southwestern Japan, the mountains of the Nishikubiki mountain land of Northeastern Japan and a Fossa Magna area, and the flow of Himekawa can be seen from a train window. Since Oito Line passes along the area of steep and weak geology, it has suffered many natural disasters. Especially, for 7.11 flood damage in 1995, it suffered serious damage, and by the time between Kotaki Station and Minami-Otari Station was restored, it took in two years or more.

The highlight from a train window

Itoigawa Station (altitude of 5 m)

Much jade from Itoigawa is around a station. Exposure exhibition of the jewelry of the station front is only here in Japan.

Himekawa Station (32 m)

It is the station made at the end by the JNR age. The steam of a hot spring can be seen.

Kubiki-Ono Station (49 m)

Mt. Kurohimeyama which consist of a limestone of the Carboniferous to Permian can be seen. The cut for road called Utou of the salt trail is in about 2 km of south directions.

Nechi Station (90m)

It is on foot 10 minutes to the Fossa Magna Park which can inspect a Major fault and giant pillow lava. You can see Mt. Komagatake which consists of andesite.

Kotaki Station (134m)

You can see Mt. Myojosan which consists of limestone. There is about 5 km to the place where jade was first discovered in Japan in 1938.

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Hiraiwa Station (263m)

You can enjoy the scene of the Himekawa ravine from a train window. Here, it is the section which Oito Line runs at 25 km/h. It is an entrance to Renge hot spring and Mt. Shiroumadake.

Geopark activities using the Oito Line

The JR West Japan Co. operated around the Geopark train (Geopark-Go) at the time of abolition of the KiHa 52 series (diesel multiple unit) in 2010. Within the train, explanation of the scenery from the train window by the curator of Fossa Magna Museum was given. In the Kotaki walking which inspects around the Kotaki Jade Gorge performed every year, participation by car is avoided and it recommends gathering using the Oito Line.

Keywords: geotourism, railroad, Itoigawa, Geopark, Oito Line, train window