

The Promotion of Nanki Kumano Geopark Plan

HIGASHIKAWA, Tomoaki^{1*} ; HASHIZUME, Masaki¹ ; TAWARA, Takaharu¹ ; TANIWAKI, Tomokazu¹

¹Nanki Kumano Geopark Promotion Council

The area of Nanki Kumano Geopark Plan is located in the southern part of the Kii Peninsula, the southernmost point of Honshu. It consists of a city, 7 towns and a village: Shingu City, Shirahama Town, Kamitonda Town, Susami Town, Nachikatsuura Town, Taiji Town, Kozagawa Town, Kushimoto Town and Kitayama Village.

The total area of Nanki Kumano Geopark Plan is approximately 1,356 km²; the area stretches 60 km from east to west and 60 km from north to south. It includes various landforms ranging from steep mountains over 1,000 m to deeply-indented coastlines formed by the submerged coast.

The area of Nanki Kumano is blessed with mild and moist climate, but does not have many plain fields because it consists largely of steep mountains. Besides, roads were not built in earlier times. Therefore, the livelihoods of people have relied on forestry, fishery, and shipping industry since a long time ago. In addition, the geography, nature and culture of this area inspired a feeling of awe in city people away from the area. Historically, many people have visited this area and it has prospered as sacred sites of Kumano worship. In modern times, it has become a key area of forestry, fishery, and shipping and has also thrived on diggings of mineral resources, papermaking industry, hot springs and tourism.

However, in recent years, regional disparity between urban and rural areas has widened. We can see depopulation, aging and industry decline in rural areas, although pavements, railroads, ports and an airport have been developed and traffic has become more convenient than before.

In this situation, the progress of earth science gradually revealed the formation process of geological and geographical features peculiar to this area. Moreover, it has turned out that those features are quite unique. This area consists of three kinds of geological conditions formed by a series of plate movements. The central part is made up of accretionary prism formed by subduction of oceanic plate near the ocean trench. The eastern and western parts are respectively composed of forearc-basin sediments formed on accretionary prism. Additionally, igneous rocks are distributed in the eastern part. These three landforms exist in this area due to the encounter of plates. Thus, we can learn typical three geological formations showing the formation process of the land in addition to dynamic planet activity, namely, subduction of plate.

Culture, history, industry and people's life have been developed in this area by using geological and geographical features. People feel a sense of pride in each of them and gradually recognize that they are valuable assets that should be left to future generations.

The area of Nanki Kumano is the core of Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range registered as a World Heritage Site in 2004. Sacred Sites, Pilgrimage Routes, Cultural Landscapes are already regarded highly as worthwhile. However, we think not only they but also charm and value of this area can be enhanced by exploring dynamism of a land formation, the formation process of nature and contacts between people and nature in this area. We are working on the geopark project with the idea that charm and value of this area will give local people confidence and pride and will create new jobs and opportunities for human interaction. We believe it important for sustainable local development to advance this project in the area of Nanki Kumano. Therefore, we apply for membership in Japanese Geoparks Network.

We would like to contribute to Japan Geoparks Network by demonstrating a new model of geopark activities; we can enhance each value of the sites by connecting the geological heritage with the existing property: the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kushimoto Coral Communities (a registered wetland under the Ramsar Convention) and Yoshino-Kumano National Park.

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