

GGN - Geopark Annual Report 2019

1. GEOPARK IDENTITY

Geopark name, country, regional Network:

Itoigawa UNESCO Global Geopark, Japan,
(Asia-Pacific Geoparks Network)

Year of inscription / Year of the last revalidation:

2009 / 2017



Ōtokoro Cedar Forest Hiking Tour

2. GEOPARK FIGURES

Number of Geopark staffs: 14 members of staff including 5 geoscientists and 2 archaeologists

Number of visitors: 90,970 visitors to the Fossa Magna Museum

Number of Geopark events: 86 events held by management body and cooperating organizations

Number of school classes realize Geopark educational programs: 112 schools, 618 classes

- School excursions visiting the Geopark: 66 schools, 3,120 students
- Local preschool programs: 23 preschools, 138 classes
- Local school programs: 23 schools (14 primary, 4 middle, 3 secondary, 2 special needs), 8,319 students, 414 classes

Number of Geopark press releases: 135 (Fax, email, homepage, social media, newsletter)

3. GEOPARK ACTIVITIES

Major achievements in 2019

- **SDGs Education Programs:** We cooperated with a local secondary school (Itoigawa High School) to hold a new SDGs-focused workshop for students and teachers. We also worked with Tokyo's Seigakuin Junior High School to hold an exchange meeting focused on applying the SDGs in Itoigawa. (See the new education programs section below)
- **New Geotourism Development:** We cooperated with various organizations to develop new sustainable tourism products within the Geopark, including the Ōtokoro Cedar Forest Hiking Tour, the Emperor Meiji's Royal Progress Tour, the Konoura Regional Tour and the Mt. Yakeyama Regional Charm Tour. (See the sustainable tourism section below)
- **Conservation Project:** We began work on creating an updated list of rare and endangered flora and fauna in the Geopark area through the Itoigawa Geopark Council's Natural Resources Conservation Committee. (See the geoconservation section below)
- **10th Anniversary Project:** Planning was done for a special forum and workshop series celebrating the Geopark's 10th anniversary. (See promotional activities section below)

Contribution towards GGN - Networking and participation

- We actively participated in the APGN International Symposium in Rinjani-Lombok UGGp in September and the Hong Kong Capacity Building Workshop in April.
- We continued our Sister Geopark activities with Hong Kong UGGp, including our 9th annual student exchange program in August and attending the opening of a new visitor center (The Kau Sai Village Story Room) in December.
- We continued our contributions to the GGN website and newsletter as appropriate.

Management and Financial Status

- Our management remains stable through the Itoigawa Geopark Council, a management body consisting of 34 member organizations comprising national and local government bodies, local commercial and tourist organizations, local resident groups, transportation companies and universities. These organizations assist in the management and activities of the Itoigawa Geopark through five working groups: “Education & Disaster Risk Reduction,” “Preservation & Conservation,” “Community Development,” “Tourism” and “Project Management.”
- The finances of the Itoigawa Geopark remain stable. While direct funding from local government authorities is decreasing compared to previous years, self-funding through merchandise sales and sponsor programs is increasing. Of particular note is our agreement with local beverage distributors which provides funding through sales of soft drinks from vending machines located within the Geopark area. New projects make use of available national, local and private grants whenever feasible.

Geoconservation

- The Itoigawa Geopark Council founded the Natural Resources Conservation Committee in 2018 to facilitate and improve conservation efforts within the Geopark area. The Committee, comprised of experts as well as local residents, began full operation in 2019, creating an updated list of rare and endangered plants and wildlife within the Itoigawa Geopark to facilitate conservation efforts. This list will eventually be made partially public, but only after measures are in place to prevent issues including poaching and overtourism.
- In order to promote the appropriate, conservation-minded enjoyment of Itoigawa Geopark’s diverse variety of stones, a new “Stone Guide” program was begun. Through a series of 5 lecture courses and 4 practical courses, prospective guides learn about local stones and minerals as well as about their value as geological heritage and importance of



Geopark Stone Guide Course

conservation of geological resources. In its first year, 174 people participated in Stone Guide classes, 45 people took the certification exam and 39 people passed certification as “Itoigawa Stone Guides.” The program will continue with an advanced course to be offered in 2020.

- Dialogue and cooperation with local residents and stakeholders continued in accordance with conservation management plans at major geosites including Fossa Magna Park, the Kotakigawa Jade Gorge, Oyashirazu Cliffs, etc.

Sustainable tourism (Geotourism)

- We continue to provide regular lecture programs and tours related to the Geopark’s geological, natural and cultural heritage.
- The Seasonal Geopark Tour Bus “Geomaru-Go!” and Mountain Trailhead Taxi continue to be popular programs within the Geopark, offering visitors options to visit sites not serviced by regular public transportation.
- Several new tours have been developed in 2019 through cooperation with various organizations, including ①Ōtokoro Cedar Forest Hiking Tour, developed with the help of the Niigata Prefectural Government, which takes visitors on a hike through forests with many large, ancient cedar trees with unusual shapes caused by a combination of heavy snowfall and traditional forest management techniques. Due to conservation concerns as well as in respect of the wishes of the local residents, this area is only open to limited-size groups as part of guided tours. ②Emperor Meiji’s Royal Progress Tour, developed by members of the Itoigawa Geopark Tourist Guide Association, traces the route taken by Emperor Meiji through the Itoigawa region in 1878 as part of his imperial tour, including the treacherous crossing of Itoigawa’s Oyashirazu Cliffs ③Konoura Regional Tour, developed by local residents as well as the Itoigawa Branch of Junior Chamber International, this tour introduces the Konoura Region of Itoigawa Geopark. Local residents and Geopark scientists have cooperated in surveying local geological, natural and cultural heritage in the development of a new course.
- One of our member organizations, the Ministry of the Environment Shin’etsu Natural Environment Office worked with local residents and tourist organizations to conduct a pilot tour of Itoigawa Geopark’s Mt. Yakeyama region, focused on one of Japan’s youngest active volcanoes. Data collected from participant surveys and communication with local residents and stakeholders will be used to identify any possible issues as preparation continues.
- Our most popular tour program, the Maikomidaira Karst Tour, had to be cancelled for the 2019 season due to a collapse along the only access road. Cooperation continues with local organizations and stakeholders to restore safe access to the site with a goal of restarting the tour as soon as is safely possible.

New education programmes on geoconservation, sustainable development and disaster risk reduction

- We cooperated with Itoigawa High School through the school's "Comprehensive Pursuits" curriculum to hold a series of lectures and workshops on the Sustainable Development Goals and how they relate to Geopark Activities.
- We also cooperated with the Seigakuin Junior High School in Tokyo to hold an exchange program in Itoigawa. 5 students from Seigakuin Junior High School joined 5 students from various schools in Itoigawa to hold the "Itoigawa Future Conference," an exchange workshop where students shared ideas about how to apply the SDGs to drive sustainable community development in the Itoigawa Geopark Area. In addition, the students have put together a website and social media accounts to promote this new project.
- We cooperated with Itoigawa Hakurei High School as they held the "Hakurei Disaster Risk Reduction Forum 2019" which was also attended by local junior high schools students. The students attended a variety of lectures, hands-on activities and workshops over the course of two days to learn about natural disasters in the Itoigawa Geopark Area, how they occur, and what can be done to reduce risks related to them.
- Itoigawa Hakurei High School also hosted students from Muroto High School in Muroto UGGp for a day of exchange. Students discussed Geopark Studies programs in each of their schools and Geopark areas as well as various environmental and social issues facing each region.
- We also planned for a national training course on SDGs for Japanese Geoparks Network members as well as local residents and stakeholders, but the arrival of the Reiwa 1 East Japan Typhoon (Typhoon Hagibis) forced the workshop to be cancelled due to safety concerns. A smaller version of this course was held in February 2020.



Studying volcanic rocks at Mt. Yakeyama

Strategic partnership

- We continue to maintain strategic academic partnerships with Joetsu University of Education (Since 2013) and Niigata University (Since 2016). We established a new partnership with the Niigata University of Management in 2019 which will focus on developing sustainable regional tourism. As there are no university campuses within the Itoigawa Geopark area, such strategic partnerships are crucial.
- We also maintain a close partnership with the Ministry of the Environment through their Shin'etsu Natural Environment Office (Since 2009).

- In 2019 we signed a new partnership agreement with the National Research Institute for Earth Science and Disaster Resilience (NIED) to provide realtime mapping of seismic activity along the Itoigawa-Shizuoka Tectonic Line.
- We also signed an official Friendship Agreement with the Naumann Family, descendants of Dr. Edmund Naumann, the Father of Modern Japanese Geology and discoverer of the Fossa Magna. This agreement was signed to assure a close relationship with the Naumann Family who have long cooperated with Itoigawa City and the Itoigawa Geopark.

Promotional activities

- Promotional appearances at conferences and forums both domestic and international.
- Sharing events and activities on official website and social media accounts.
- New Geopark promotional flags, banners, pamphlets, posters and merchandise.
- 11th Annual Itoigawa Geopark Certification Exam held in Itoigawa, Niigata City and Tokyo
- Regularly published newsletter distributed in the Itoigawa City Bulletin
- “Funny Stones Contest 2019” in which local citizens were called to send in unusual stones they had found in the Itoigawa Geoparks. The grand prize winning entry was a piece of greenstone which had eroded into the shape of Rodin’s “The Thinker,” discovered by a local primary school student and his grandfather along the beach. This stone, along with other winners, was placed on display in a special exhibit at the Fossa Magna Museum.



Rodin's *The Thinker* in Greenstone

- A large forum and international academic conference was planned to celebrate Itoigawa Geopark’s 10th anniversary in the Global Geoparks Network. The forum invited speakers including Dr. Nikolaos Zouros, Dr. Setsuya Nakada of the Japan Geopark Committee, Dr. Sigurður Sigursveinsson of Katla UGGp, Dr. KM Yeung of Hong Kong UGGp and more. Unfortunately, the arrival of the Reiwa 1 East Japan Typhoon (Typhoon Hagibis) meant the forum, conference and related programs had to be cancelled. Drs. Zouros, Nakada and Sigursveinsson were already en route to the Itoigawa Geopark, so a small exchange program was held instead. Due to budget constraints and difficulty finding an available venue, the 10th anniversary forum was reduced in scale and postponed until February 2020.

4. CONTACTS

Manager: Mr. Toshiyuki Oshima (geopark@city.itoigawa.lg.jp)

Geologist: Dr. Ko Takenouchi (geopark@city.itoigawa.lg.jp)