

Castle of the ruler Ruins of Akutagawa castle

The ruins of Akutagawa castle are located on Mount Miyoshi on the east side of Settsu-kyo gorge. This was the largest mountain castle built during the Sengoku period (1467-1415) in the province of Settsu which is now in the northern area of Osaka. This was a natural fortress with an area spanning 500m from east to west and 400m from north to south. Its base is surrounded on three sides by a river, with a canyon on the other side, making it difficult for enemies to approach. Utilizing the slope of the terrain, the castle's main enclosure (honmaru) was at the top of the mountain, and there were compounds, known as "kuruwa", where people lived at different places on the mountain.

In those days, castles did not have the high stone walls and water-filled moats often seen in later Japanese castles, but instead used trenches (horikiri) and earthwork mounds (dorui) to blockade mountain ridges and cut off access to the enemy. The castle ruins still show traces of these structures. Stone walls, which were rare in those days, can also be seen in the channels of the valley.

Akutagawa Castle was built by Hosokawa Takakuni, governor of Settsu, and completed in 1516. It is said that 300 to 500 people worked day and night on its construction. Later on, he was vanquished by Hosokawa Harumoto who took control of the castle. Harumoto was expelled in 1549 by his vassal, Miyoshi Nagayoshi, who marched on the castle from the province of Awa (which is now an area of Tokushima Prefecture) to Settsu-no-kuni.

Nagayoshi also banished the shogun of the Muromachi Shogunate, Ashikaga Yoshiteru, from Kyoto and assumed control of the surrounding provinces, known as the "Kinai" region, which was essentially the center of political power in Japan at that time. In 1553, he attacked Akutagawa Castle and took up residence there. Matsunaga Hisahide and other vassals also moved into the castle, and many people came to the castle seeking an audience with them. Akutagawa Castle thus became the cornerstone of the integration of the Kinai region during the Sengoku period. Excavations have revealed the remains of many fine buildings and household utensils from that period.

In 1568, Oda Nobunaga, protector of Ashikaga Yoshiaki, banished the Miyoshi family and took control of the castle. He received envoys from the Emperor, as well as holding audiences with court nobles and samurai in the Kinai area. After this, he moved to Kyoto. Yoshiaki's vassal, Wada Koremasa, became the lord of the castle, and the father of Takayama Ukon was appointed as the castle keeper (jodai). Koremasa moved to Takatsuki Castle in 1569, and Akutagawa Castle's role as a seat of political power gradually faded.



Imaginary illustration of Ruins of Akutagawa castle (drawn by Yamamoto Takatoshi)



Foundation stone for building in the main enclosure (Palace architecture)



Traces of a senretsu tatemono (a building lined with tiles round the base of its outer wall) found in the kuruwa-compound, a downwards step south of the castle's main enclosure (honmaru). There may have been yagura here (watchtower, or storehouse for weapons such as arrows). Such buildings were rarely found in mountain castles.

Miyoshi Nagayoshi, the first ruler in Japan's Sengoku (Warring States) period

Miyoshi Nagayoshi

Miyoshi Nagayoshi ruled the Kinai region, which was essentially the focal point of political power in Japan at that time, from Akutagawa castle for seven years (1553-1560) under his own name rather than giving allegiance to the Ashikaga shogun family. This is why he is viewed as the first tenkabito (ruler of Japanese central politics) rather than Oda Nobunaga. He adjudicated on the dispute over water rights in the villages of Makami and Gunge below the castle, and focused his political efforts on local issues. He was also a cultured man who associated with the merchants in Sakai, enjoyed renga poetry and the tea ceremony, and accepted Christianity.



Miyoshi Nagayoshi mohon (copy of an original manuscript) <Collection of The Kyoto University Museum>

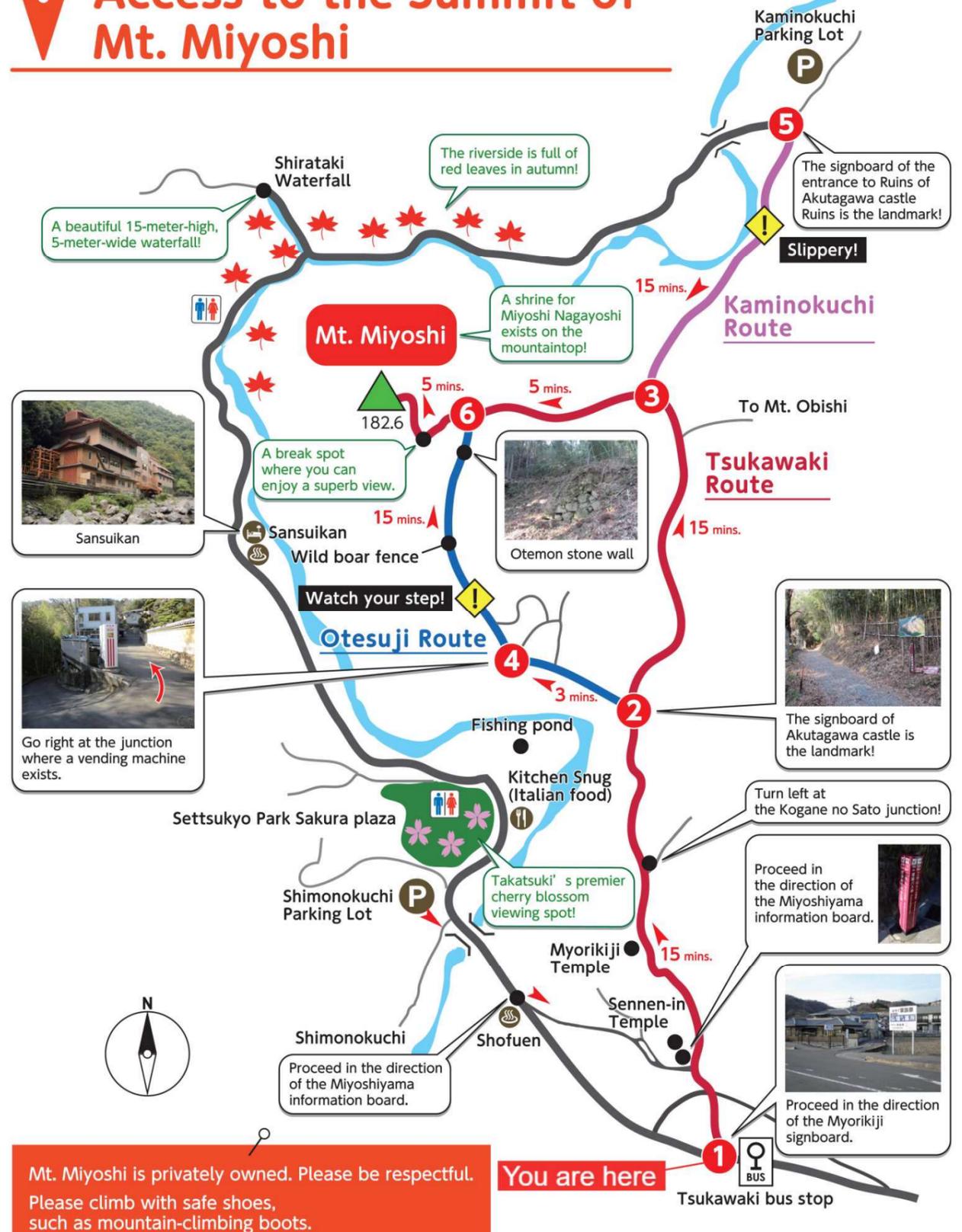
Matsunaga Hisahide

Although Matsunaga Hisahide tends to be depicted as a villain in Japanese history, he was in fact a loyal supporter of Nagayoshi and served as his right-hand man. There are many theories about Matsunaga's origins, but the most popular of these is that he was born in Higashiyosumi in Takatsuki City into a wealthy family with connections to the lord of Takatsuki Castle.



Image of Matsunaga Hisahide (copy of an original manuscript) <Collection of Takatsuki Shiroato History Museum>

Access to the Summit of Mt. Miyoshi



Continued Top 100 Japanese Castle Certification Ruins of Akutagawa castle

The ruins of Akutagawa Castle are located on Mount Miyoshi. This was one of the foremost castles of the Sengoku Period (1467-1615), its location skillfully utilizing its natural strategic location overlooking Osaka Plain. The center of the castle was located at the highest point in the area, and some trenches (horikiri), earthwork mounds (dorui) and stone walls (ishigaki) can still be seen today.

Hosokawa Takakuni, shugo (provincial guardian) of Settsu Province (which is now northern Osaka area), completed the castle in 1516 and entrusted it to the protection of his vassal, Nose Yorinori. Miyoshi Nagayoshi marched from Awa Province (which is now an area of Tokushima prefecture) to Settsu and entered the castle in 1553 on behalf of his master, Hosokawa Harumoto. Nagayoshi resided at the castle for seven years, before handing it over to his eldest son, Yoshioki, and moving to Imori Castle in Kawachi (which is now southern Osaka area) in 1560. He appointed vassals such as Matsunaga Hisahide to act on his behalf; rather than giving allegiance to the Ashikaga shogun family, he ruled the Kinai region under his own name.

During this time, the castle served as the capital of the region. This is why Nagayoshi is considered to be the first tenkabito (ruler of Japanese central politics) rather than Oda Nobunaga. Nagayoshi devoted himself to local political issues, including ruling on the dispute over water rights between Makami village and Gunge village beneath the castle. He was also a cultured man who associated with the merchants in Sakai, enjoyed renga poetry and the tea ceremony, and gave consent to Christian missionaries to go about their work.

The excavation of the main castle enclosure has shown traces of a full-scale building, and this has changed the common perception of castles of the Sengoku period.

In 1568, Oda Nobunaga banished the Miyoshi family and took control of the castle. He assessed the situation in the country at that time and moved to the capital, Kyoto. Later, Shogun Ashikaga Yoshiaki's vassal, Wada Koremasa, took over the castle, but moved to Takatsuki Castle the following year. Akutagawa Castle's prominence as a seat of political power gradually faded.

Access to the Summit of Mt. Miyoshi

