Scenery Created by Water

At the base of the mountains in this park, there is much picturesque scenery of water: valleys such as the Soukyo Gorge and the Tenminkyo Gorge, and lakes such as Lake Shikaribetsu.

Columnar Joints

Rocky walls on both banks of the Soukyo Gorge and Tenminkyo Gorge have patterned cracks, which make them look like a series of polygonal pillars. This phenomenon is called columnar joints. The rocks that compose Soukyo Gorge and Tenminkyo Gorge are welded tufts, which are made by the solidification of materials from pyroclastic flow (such as volcanic ash and pumice stones) upon eruption. When the released materials accumulate heavily, the heat melts the materials, which become pressured by their own weight, resulting in the formation of highly dense rocks. When the rocks on the ground surface cool down and shrink, cracks appear and extend downward into the ground, resulting in the formation of columnar joints.

The Soukyo Gorge is a deep valley situated on the east side of Daisetsuzan. The Ishikari River runs through it. It was created by the river excavating the plateau where pyroclastic flow of the volcanoes in Daisetsuzan had accumulated. You can witness the scale of the erosion and the power of water flow, which resulted in the formation of a large canyon cutting through such a thick accumulation of materials. There is a series of columnar joints of welded tuffs (pyroclastic rocks) along both banks, as well as waterfalls such as Ryusen Falls and Genga Falls. In addition, picturesque scenery such as Obako and Kusak are in the upstream area.

Lake Shikaribetsu

Lake Shikaribetsu is the only large natural lake in this national park. It is an oligotrophic lake located at about 800m above sea level with total area of about 3.5km². There are two theories regarding its formation: either a volcano which had been active over 10,000 years ago intercepted a river, or it is actually a crater lake. The lake begins to freeze in mid-December, remaining frozen for almost half the year. It is surrounded by forests. Mount Hakuun and Mount Timbessa are on its south bank. The trail running along the south shore of the lake reaches Lake Toi, another small lake located to the east of Lake Shikaribetsu. In addition, despite its relatively low altitude, Japanese Pikas live in the East Nipkokaushinopuri area in the south where there are abundant rocks and crevices. This is due to the fact that the cold winds blowing through the crevices make the microclimate of the area similar to the alpine zone.

The Tenminkyo Gorge

The Tenminkyo Gorge is situated at the western base of Daisetsuzan and was created by the Chubetsu River, a tributary of the Ishikari River. The rocks and geological formations are the same as those in the Soukyo Gorge: welded tufts formed from the pyroclastic flow of the volcanoes in Daisetsuzan, with a series of columnar joints. Hagoromo Falls (a 270m waterfall) and the broad Shikishima Falls are located in this area. The damage to the forest caused by Typhoon Toyamari was relatively minor in this area, and thus a beautiful canopy of trees remains.

The Snow Crystals of Mount Asahi

Dr. Ichiro Nakaya (1900–1962), a professor at Hokkaido University, made a lot of studies on snow, including the classification of snow crystal. He launched himself into the study, being fascinated by the beauty of snow crystals under a microscope. He is the first researcher who revealed the conditions for snow crystal formation. Mount Asahi was the field of his study. Daisetsuzan’s snow, which is of low temperature and great purity, demonstrated the ideal crystal structure to Nakaya, who secluded himself to conduct his research in a snow cave.

Ice Fall

Everything becomes covered by snow and ice on Daisetsuzan in the winter. It is so cold as to cause many of the waterfalls flowing into the Soukyo Gorge to freeze.