

Rishiri Island —an Independent Peak on the Ocean

A Volcanic Island Rising Out of the Ocean

Rishiri Island is a roughly circular island of about 60km in circumference. It is located approximately 20km off the coast of Wakkanai City. The island is formed around Mount Rishiri.

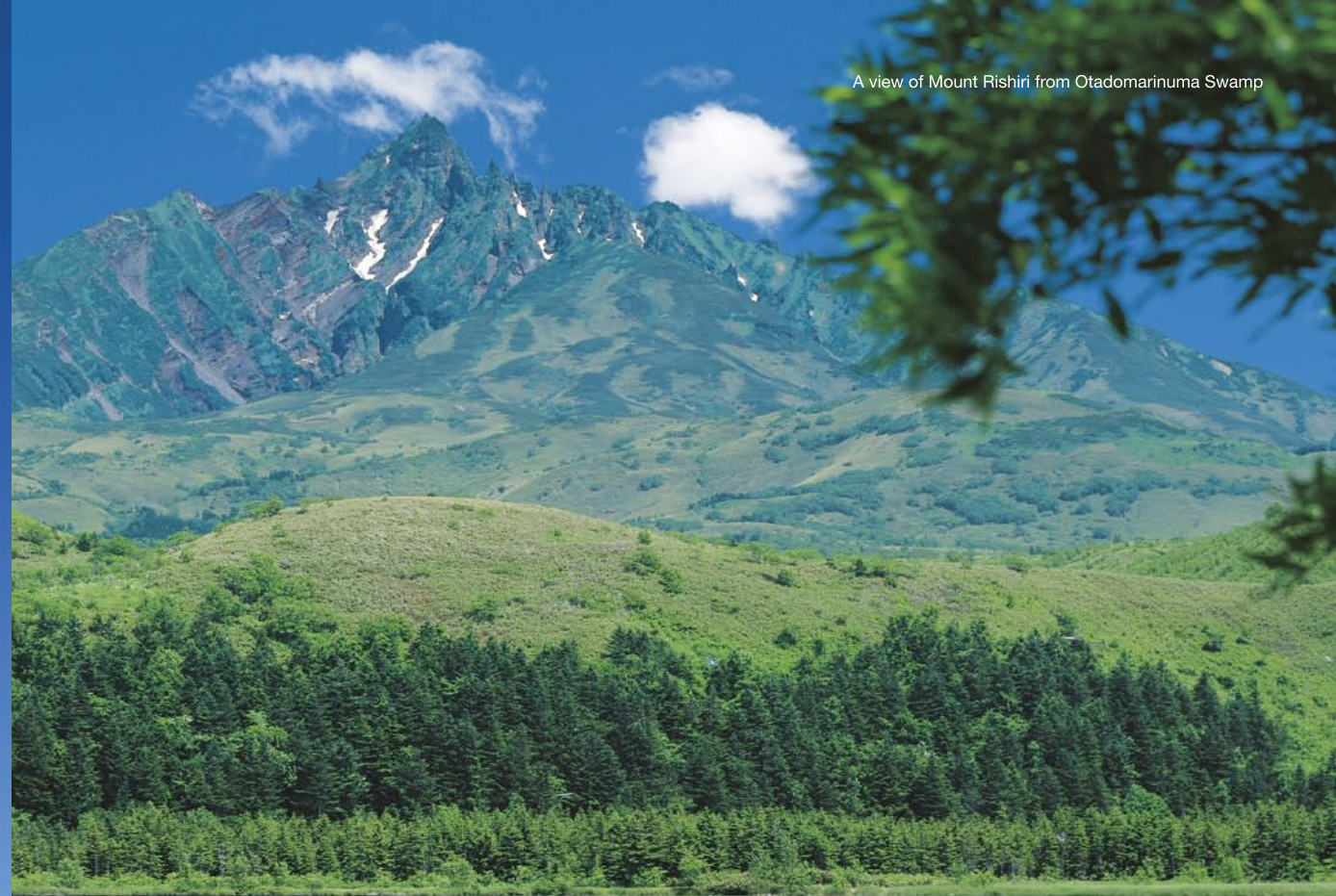
Mount Rishiri, at an elevation of 1,721m, is a volcano that emerged about 200,000 years ago and ceased activity about 7,000 years ago. With its long skirt and conical shape, the mountain resembles Mount Fuji. However, because of the sharp crags projecting upward from its slender ridges and deep valleys cutting down through them, the summit area has a rather rugged appearance. Most of the streams have dried up, and there are many springs at the base. There are a few parasitic volcanoes at the base, as well as ponds and wetlands, including Himenuma Swamp and Otadomarinuma Swamp.



Unique Climate of the Island

Rishiri Island, projecting upward from the ocean surface, has a unique climate. It is generally windy, especially near the summit. However, in the lowlands, there are times when strong winds blow on one side of the island while there is no wind on the other, and times when one side is covered by thick fog but the sky is clear on the other.

Mount Rishiri soars in the ocean



Column

The Remarkable Vertical Distribution of Vegetation and the Descending Alpine Zone

It is easy to determine the change in vegetation relative to the elevation on Mount Rishiri, due to its special characteristic of being an independent peak. There are coastal grasslands on the small plain, but once you climb a little higher, needleleaf forests prevail with a mixture of broadleaf trees including the Sakhalin Fir (*Abies sachalinensis*) and the Erman's Birch (*Betula ermanii*). Thickets of the Sakhalin Fir and the Green Alder (*Alnus viridis maximowiczii*) are present beyond an elevation of about 500m, and some Creeping Pines (*Pinus pumila*) begin to appear as well. The Creeping Pine and flower gardens of alpine plants extend upward from an elevation of about 1,100m. Compared to other mountains, the elevation at which Creeping Pine begins is significantly lower on Mount Rishiri (at an elevation of about 2,400m in central Honshu and about 1,800m on Daisetsuzan in central Hokkaido). This is due to the fact that it is located further north, and that it is an independent peak surrounded by the ocean with harsh climatic conditions.

