

**For First Time Climbers of Mt. Tsubakuro, the Northern Japan Alps:
A Manual Suggested by Kenji Akanuma, Proprietor, Hut Enzanso**

First and foremost, the Northern Alps are noted for their high elevation. Eight peaks are more than 3,000 meters in height, and almost all of the other mountains go beyond 2,500 meters, which is above the tree line. Climbers need to accommodate themselves to the special weather conditions of high mountain ranges such as wind, temperature, snow, and geographical features.

Mt. Tsubakuro, a very elegant and beautiful mountain, is called “Queen of the Alps.” It is very popular among climbers because they can see many colorful flowers of alpine plants such as Komakusa (dicentra) which bloom on white granite sands, can climb relatively safely in all four seasons, and can be healed and refreshed by the awe-inspiring scenery. It takes approximately 5 hours on foot on a well-maintained trail from the trailhead (1,450 meters in altitude) to Hut Enzanso (2,712 meters in altitude), and the distance between the two is about 5.5 km, while the difference in altitude is 1,260 meters. Steep hills continue up to Kassen Goya (Kassen Hut), but it is relatively safe to climb because trails are well-maintained. The following is a concise introduction to ways and manners of mountain climbing especially for the first time climbers of Mt. Tsubakuro. I hope this would be of help for safe and enjoyable climbing.

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Seasons Are Different in the Mountains than in City Areas

Good summer climbing seasons for Mt. Tsubakuro lasts for three months, from the beginning of July, when plants and flowers sprout, to the beginning of October, when snow starts falling. The winter season goes from October to June, and snow covers Mt. Tsubakuro. Paying special attentions to mountain weather is necessary particularly for first time climbers and those with small children because mountain weather is completely different from city areas.

How to Hike in the Mountains

1. It is important to lighten the weight of your backpack. You might want to check in unnecessary belongings such as spare clothes at Ariakeso for free.
2. Walking speed should be such that you can enjoy conversations slowly with your partners. If you cannot talk without getting out of breath, that means that your pace is too fast.
3. In climbing steep hills, walk with short and low steps. You will get tired if you walk with high steps, like when you go up stairs two steps at a time.
4. There are four benches, or stations, where you can take a rest up to Kassen Goya. Take 40 to 50 minutes between benches.
5. The altitude will exceed 2,000 meters when you pass the third bench. Climb by taking deeper breaths, and being more conscious about the act of breathing out.
6. Kassen Goya (Kassen Hut) is located at the tree line. You might want to take a long rest by having lunch. It is recommended that you take a rest for more than an hour to those who are sensitive to altitude.
7. Drink plenty of water when you arrive at Hut Enzanso. Stay awake for more than an hour after your arrival, or you might suffer from mountain sickness. When taking a nap, you will have shallow breaths, which will more likely lead to mountain sickness.
8. Drink alcohol carefully because alcohol has stronger effects on your body at higher altitudes.
9. It takes approximately 40 minutes to the top of Mt. Tsubakuro from Hut Enzanso. Do not leave the trail. Please follow this rule whether or not ropes are set.
10. Climb down slowly. You might want to wear mountain shoes because it is easy to wrench your ankles when going down. Knot your shoes tightly above your ankles so that the tip of your toes cannot touch the tip of your shoes. Walk down slowly, or you will have sore muscles over your whole body. Do not run down hills.
11. Regarding the use of poles, please use poles as little as possible particularly when you walk above the tree line. The edges of trails and mountains ridges are starting collapse and erode due to the heavy use of poles by many climbers. Please refrain from using poles particularly above 2,500 meters, where it exceeds the tree line, to protect the mountain environment and have a safe trip.

Mountain Climbing with Small Children

1. For those who are thinking about a trip with small children, the recommended age is six and older. Please refrain from a trip with small children younger than 3 years old because their brains are still being developed and high mountains are short on oxygen. For families with 4 or 5 year old children, please bring ropes to connect you with your children for safety reasons.
2. Please walk slowly so that you and your children can adjust to the high altitudes. In particular, when you arrive at Kassen Goya (Kassen Hut), take a long rest such as having snacks or lunch more than an hour in order to adjust to the altitude. Children will enjoy the time when parents cook some food there. Taking a long rest there is also effective for adults who are susceptible to mountain sickness.
3. Due to the environmental changes, many children often wet the bed when sleeping in the hut. Please bring paper diapers for small children.

Water Supply

Drinking water is important. Please drink water little by little at each bench. When you are still thirsty even after drinking plenty of water, this feeling can be alleviated after taking some salt or eating Umeboshi (salted plum). A salt supply is also necessary in addition to sweets for quick energy because you lose water and salt from your body when you sweat.

Manners for Mountain Climbing

1. Leave nature as is.

Please do not take pictures by walking off the trail or trampling down sandy soil. In heavy rains, water will collect in footprints causing the erosion with plants being washed away. Let us pass down the good tradition of maintaining dicentra (Komakusa) patches from generation to generation.

2. Bring back everything that you brought in.

If you dispose of garbage on the mountain, this will negatively affect the ecosystem of plants and animals. Please cooperate by not throwing garbage away on the trail. When you pack, you can reduce the garbage and weight of your baggage by getting rid of extra packaging. Please be cooperative to “take in and take out,” which means that you need to bring back home everything you bring in.

3. Do not feed wild animals.

If you feed wild animals such as foxes and monkeys because they are cute in appearance, you will also destroy the ecosystem of other animals such as Rai Cho (Japanese ptarmigan). Please do not throw garbage and food scraps away so that we can coexist with wild animals.

4. Make way for those who are climbing up.

Please show your appreciation to those who made way for you.

5. In case you want to use the toilet

Toilets are located at the starting point of the trail, Kassen Goya, and the Hut Enzanso. In case you want to use the toilet unavoidably along the way, please dig a hole in the soil slightly off the trail, cover the soil after you are finished, and bring the tissue paper back to your home.

Manners When Staying at the Mountain Hut

1. Water at Hut Enzanso is pumped up from a water reservoir 340 meters below the hut. Water is the lifeline for mountain huts and its amount is very limited compared to that of city areas. We kindly ask you to refrain from brushing your teeth with toothpaste and washing your face with soap. Please bring products for cleansing or for removing makeup specifically designed for outdoor use. Please use water carefully in the toilet. There are no bathtubs and shower rooms.
2. For those who leave in the early morning to traverse mountains
Please pack your baggage before the light is off. Please refrain from making noises and talking in the early morning because others are still sleeping. Please move quietly as possible.
3. Please walk quietly because the hut is made of wood and footsteps tend to be loud. In particular, please be careful not to make sounds when walking on the stairs.

For Day Trip Climbers to Mt. Tsubakuro

1. Day trip climbers must traverse steep hills with more than 1,300 meters difference in altitude. Many exhausted climbers have been seen below the first bench. Injuries such as broken bones, sprains and serious bodily injury resulting from accidental falls due to fatigue of feet and back have happened very close to the entrance of the trail. Please understand that you need sufficient physical capacity if you would like to plan a day trip. Some are seen to finally return to the entrance at last after sunset. Please bring a flashlight, snacks, and raingear for emergencies.
2. Because many muscles are used when going down the hills, you might have foot and knee pain. Use small steps and walk very slowly. Please refrain from running or walking down at speed.
3. On weekends and holidays, parking lots near the entrance of the trail are expected to be full. Please use public transportation such as bus and taxi, and park your car at parking lots in Hotaka. Refrain from parking your car on the road because buses cannot pass.
4. Please submit the hiking plan form before climbing. The form is located at the starting point of the trail.

Parking near the Trailhead

On weekends and holidays, parking lots near the starting point of the trail are expected to be full. Please refrain from parking your car on the road because buses cannot pass. You are asked to cooperate by using public transportation such as bus and taxi and parking your car at parking lots in Hotaka. For details, please click "Access" on our website.

Others

1. The temperature at Hut Enzanso is usually lower by 12 degrees Celsius than that of Matsumoto. It will feel even lower when it is windy. 0.6 degree is lowered every 100 meters up, but 1 degree is lowered when the wind speed increases by 1 meter per second.
2. Mountain huts located on the ridge of mountains have no bathtubs due to administrative guidelines.
3. Electricity is powered by in-house generators. Lights are off at 9 o'clock.
4. For those who are susceptible to mosquito bites, please bring insect-repelling spray.
5. The amount of ultraviolet rays will be expected to be several times higher than in urban areas. Please prepare sunscreen.

For Those Who Climb Mt. Tsubakuro in Winter

The Northern Japan Alps in winter is very windy and has a lot of snow with 3,000 meter mountains. Because of this, climbers are required to be attentive to 1) temperature, 2) wind, and 3) maintaining body temperature. At the ridge of Mt. Tsubakuro, the temperature will be -15 degrees Celsius and wind speed will be 15 to 20 meters per second. If your body temperature reaches -30 degrees Celsius, frostbite and hypothermia can result. The trail follows the ridge where it is very windy after your departure from Kassen Goya (Kassen Hut). You cannot change clothes on the trail due to strong wind. Please check your body condition and be ready for the cold. Please be well prepared before leaving Kassen Goya.

Necessary measures that you might want to take are as follows:

1. Walk slowly so that you do not sweat.
2. Wear gear with good cold and wind protection.
3. Eat snacks with high calories periodically.
4. Climbing irons need to be fit on your shoes beforehand, and be sure to practice walking with them.
5. Bring equipment such as a rescue sheet and tent so that you can have shelter in an emergency.
6. If it is raining at Nakafusa, the starting point of the trail, it may be better to cancel your climb. We kindly ask you to refrain from climbing because of the danger of getting your body wet.
7. Be responsible for yourself even when you participate in a tour.