

Light-breed Horse Ranches

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A Landscape with Horses

The Hidaka region is known to be the nation's top producer of horses. Biratori, located inland along the west coast, boasts the 5th largest number of light-breed horses among the 7 districts within the jurisdiction (table 1).

The ranchers are mostly located in Kawamukai, Honcho, and Nibutani, thus, grazing horses are a part of the everyday landscapes in these areas. The landscape of horses in the *chise* village around the Munro residents and other traditional Ainu sites in town are scenes that represent the changing lifestyle of Biratori residents along the Saru River.



Photo: Grazing light breed horses. Horses eat fodder in the morning and graze in the pasture during the day. The production of military horses, agricultural horses, and racehorses has been continuously handed down through the generations since the Meiji era.

Light-breed Horse Production in Biratori

(1) Warhorse

Biratori's livestock has always gathered attention because of its hilly geography suitable for grazing, and its mild winters.

Commercial scale production of warhorses in Hidaka started in 1872 when the Niikappu Imperial Stock Farm and the Hidaka Studhorse Farm began.

After 1884, officials in the area

Table 2: The History of Light-breed Horse Production in the Hidaka Area

- 1872: Niikappu Imperial Stock Farm, Hidaka Studhorse Farm opens.
- 1884: Horses are imported from overseas in an attempt to improve the quality of warhorses.
- 1945: Warhorses loses purpose after the war. Role shifts to agricultural use.
- 1954: The town switches over to producing racehorses (light breed horses) in order to cater to the budding horseracing industry.
- 1960: Tractor-use becomes widespread leading to the decline and termination of agricultural horses. Production of light breed horses expands due to regulations on land conditions, etc.
- 1970: Transition towards the production of light breed horses progresses due to laws reducing rice crop in the region.

(Hokkaido Hidaka Promotion Bureau 2011)

Table 1: Statistics On Light-breed Horses within Hidaka (unit: 10,000,000 Yen)

| District | Hidaka Promotion Bureau | Hidaka | Biratori | Niikappu | Shin Hidaka | Urakawa | Samani | Erimo |
|--|-------------------------|--------|----------|----------|-------------|---------|--------|-------|
| Agriculture (1) | 4690 | 1114 | 621 | 771 | 1312 | 716 | 78 | 78 |
| Light-breed Horses (2) | 2949 | 686 | 70 | 493 | 978 | 641 | 56 | 25 |
| Fishery (3) | 1831 | 110 | 0 | 54 | 225 | 320 | 302 | 820 |
| Manufacturing (4) | 3709 | 1544 | 91 | 135 | 401 | 389 | 917 | 232 |
| Wholesale, Retail (5) | 11072 | 1997 | 346 | 479 | 4726 | 2181 | 676 | 667 |
| Industry share ratio of light breed horse to other industries (2)/((1)+(3)+(4)+(5)) | 13.8% | 1.4% | 0.7% | 34.3% | 24.7% | 17.8% | 2.8% | 1.4% |

(Hokkaido Hidaka Promotion Bureau 2011)

advocated for better quality horses and began to import better-quality horses from overseas (table 2).

After the Russo-Japanese War began in the latter half of the Meiji era, Biratori began the process of forest grazing for their warhorses in large-scale farms such as the Shukushubetsu Bokujo (currently, a town-owned pasture). The area where Lily of the Valleys grows has been specified as the town's natural monument. It still reflects the landscape of these war-time periods.

(2) Racehorse

After the end of the war in 1945, the town saw a decline in the demand for warhorses and agricultural horses. However, the demand for racehorses increased due to the start of the full-blown horseracing industry. The switch and specialization in producing light breed horses progressed especially in the Hidaka area, which became the largest producer of light breed horses in the nation.

In 1955, farmers in Biratori began breeding Arabian horses in the Kawamukai district and its vicinity. By 1965, the number of 2-year-old horses was 55: 16 Thoroughbreds and 39 Anglo-Arabian horses. In November of the same year, the Biratori Light-breed Horse Production Promotion Association was established with the goal to organize production.

The members of this association played active roles in producing horses. The producers have triumphed in many significant races with their Arabian horses all over Japan. Numerous horses produced by the members of the association have won G1 titles in Chuo Keiba (table 4).

In the region, the Monbetsu Racecourses in Hidaka next to Biratori hosts horse racing events in Hokkaido. During the months of April to November, the Racecourse hosts nighttime horse racing events, where the audience can enjoy the sight of powerful horses right in front of their eyes.

Table 3: Number of Light-breed Horses in Biratori

| Year | Number of Breeding Female Horses (Total Produced) | |
|------|---|---------------|
| | Thoroughbred | Anglo-Arabian |
| 1965 | 45 (18) | 74 (47) |
| 1980 | 184 (119) | 173 (137) |
| 1985 | 187 (106) | 204 (154) |
| 1990 | 284 (197) | 152 (118) |
| 1995 | 287 (194) | 169 (117) |
| 2000 | 281 (212) | 36 (28) |
| 2005 | 240 (198) | 5 (2) |
| 2010 | 230 (144) | 0 (0) |

(Hokkaido Hidaka Promotion Bureau 2012)

Table 4: In-town Breeders Who Have G1 Titles

| Year | Race Name | Horse Name | Breeder Name |
|------|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1980 | 21st Takarazuka Kinen | Terutenryu | Inahara Bokujo |
| 1985 | 26th Takarazuka Kinen | Suzuka Koban | Inahara Bokujo |
| 1991 | 8th Mile Championship | Daitaku Heriosu | Shimizu Bokujo |
| 1992 | 9th Mile Championship | Daitaku Heriosu | Shimizu Bokujo |
| 1996 | 26th Takamatsumiya-hai | Flower Park | Hiraku Takahashi |
| 1996 | 30th Sprinters Stakes | Flower Park | Hiraku Takahashi |
| 1998 | 39th Takarazuka Kinen | Silence Suzuka | Inahara Bokujo |
| 1999 | 16th February Stakes | Meisei Opera | Hiraku Takahashi |
| 2000 | 34th Sprinters Stakes | Daitaku Yamato | Miyabi Bokujo |
| 2007 | 37th Takamatsu-hai | Suzuka Phoenix | Inahara Bokujo |
| 2011 | 134th Nakayama Daishogai | Majesty Bio | Shimizu Bokujo |
| 2012 | 14th Nakayama Grand Jump | Majesty Bio | Shimizu Bokujo |

(JA Biratori Website)

Table 5: Horse-related Jargon

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|--------------------|---|
| Light-breed Horse: | Usually refers to Arabs, Thoroughbreds, Anglo-Arabs, Arab mixes, and Thoroughbred mixes used as racehorses and warhorses. |
| Heavy-breed Horse: | A horse specifically bred for agricultural use. |
| Arab: | A horse species. In Japan, it usually refers to an Arab mix called Anglo-Arab, which is a mix of other species such as Thoroughbreds. |
| Thoroughbred: | A type of horse species that has been bred through selective breeding to be racehorses. It refers to the Arab mix with the bloodline of Arabs from Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. Mainly used for competition. |
| Equestrian Horse | A horse that has been raised for equestrian competitions. |
| Race Horse | A horse that has been raised for race competitions. There are Thoroughbreds and Arabs. In Ban'ei horserace, Ban'ei species usually dominate. |

"Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development"
Designated as Important Cultural Landscape as of July 26th, 2007

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