

Typical Trees Along the Saru River

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The Changing Distribution of Trees during the Late Meiji Era

The key to looking at the landscape built by the local residents is the natural landscape that laid the foundation to the people's lifestyle. Understanding the flora of the region is essential when looking at the history of life and industry.

Before the Meiji era, the coastal hills of the Hidaka area was covered in an oak forest mixed with Japanese emperor oaks, and with *pero* (water oak) further inland. As the coastal hills meet the mountainous regions, we can see more *fup* (*Abies sachalinensis*), which suggests that the border between the forests of deciduous broadleaved trees and mixed forests (conifers and broadleaved trees) is located near Biratori Hon-cho. Among the forests along the river, there are the long-term, stable riverside forests with *harunire* and short-term regenerative forests with short willows and other kinds of trees.

It is assumed that in the modern era, the Saru River was covered in a thick forest. Since then, the primitive



Photo 1: *Ranko* near the museum (Katsura: photo taken from the West). It is a tree that grows in riverside forests with long-term stability and used as a material for *chip* (boat). The preservation of biodiversity of the trees is an important issue for the transmission of Ainu culture.

forests have shifted into something that we see today. These changes include the cultivation of agricultural land, the replacement of conifers and broadleaved trees, cultivation of pasture land...etc.

How Ainu Utilized the Forests

The usage and deforestation of wooded areas rapidly increase when wood-based products hold value as merchandise. Even during the med-

ieval to the modern era, much of the forests were lost due to the herring fishing industry off of the Japanese Sea coast.

Despite this, the process of deforestation did not reach far into the inland Saru area.

Old records show that there were large settlements in Nukibetsu and Horokeshi. This indicates that the riverside forests and the riverbank terraces were cultivated for agricultural use. However, this is an exception, rather than a rule for the region. Back then, people did not contribute to extreme deforestation at all—people simply took what they needed from neighboring forests. There was enough wood from driftwood and fallen branches to use for fire.

The people then would use the flora in a sustainable manner. At times, the residents would cut down trees as material for homes, boats, containers and bowls, but this never impacted the landscape as a whole.



Photo 2: A giant *chikisani* (Japanese elm) being used as a tree providing shade in a town-owned pasture (Shukushubetsu district) (photo taken from the South). Due to the transition of the local industry in modern day/current day, the local flora has changed.

Deforestation as a Result of the Colonization of Hokkaido

If agriculture becomes the main

source of income for residents, what results is the deforestation of forests on mild slopes, which becomes cultivated as agricultural land. During the Meiji era, the *harunire* forests (located near the source of the river) were ranked as "most suitable" for development and thus were first to go.

The soil that the *harunire* forests grew on had rich alluvial soil and good water drainage, making it very suitable for agriculture. However, it was also the ecosystem in which food sources such as the *turep* (*Cardiocrinum cordatum* var. *glehnii*) and *pukusakina* (*Anemone Flaccida*) grew, which were essential for Ainu cuisine.

Similarly, the willow and Japanese poplar forests along the river were also replaced by agricultural land. The Alder and Swamp Ash forests that form in marshlands were drained and converted into rice paddies.

Like so, many forests were removed to sustain the process of colonization. In other places such as Shukushubetsu, forests were replaced by pasture land. The only forests that remain in these regions are trees left to provide shade for the grazing livestock.

The Utilization of Forests Today

Although many of the forests have been decimated due to repeated deforestation, people are making an effort to supplement the forest with the lacking flora in order to transmit Ainu culture.

For example, residents have been planting *atni* (lobed elm), which has been declining in numbers, to improve the quality of the forest and support culture by securing the resources that are necessary.

In addition to places which are necessary for natural resources, there needs to be an effort to recover traditional Ainu sites which have a historical and cultural significance on their own right.

One of these places is the landscape created by the bare rock cliff on the other side of Nibutani Lake and *hup* (*Abies sachalinensis*) on the ridge trail. The bare rocks have not changed

Table: Common Trees in Areas Along the Saru River and Its Uses		
Japanese name	Ainu name (Saru dialect)	Primary Usage in Ainu Tools
Mizuki	<i>Utukanni</i>	<i>Inaw</i> (similar to Gohei; a wand used in Shinto ceremony)
Yanagi	<i>Susu</i>	<i>Inaw</i> (similar to Gohei; a wand used in Shinto ceremony), <i>Tukipasuy</i> (ceremonial wooden stick)
Katsura	<i>Ranko</i>	<i>Ita</i> (tray), <i>Chip</i> (boat), <i>Itatani</i> (carving station)
Harunire	<i>Chikisani</i>	<i>Ikisap</i> (bow shaped fire starter), <i>Senpi</i> (wedge)
Enju	<i>Chikupeni</i>	<i>Chisekorkamuy</i> (home guardian), <i>Kuwa</i> (tombstone)
Mizunara	<i>Pero</i>	<i>Iyutani</i> (pestle), <i>Nisu</i> (mortar)
Ohyounire	<i>Atni</i>	<i>Attus-amip</i> (robe made from bark)
Shinanoki	<i>Nipesni</i>	<i>Saranip</i> (sack), <i>Tar</i> (rope for bag)
Todomatsu	<i>Hup</i>	<i>Kuma</i> (clothes pole), <i>Satte</i> (tool for organizing reeds)
Ezomatsu	<i>Sunku</i>	<i>Fupchachise</i> (house with a pine needle roof), <i>Fupchai</i> (pine needle)



Photo 3: Trunks of *atni* (lobed elm) with its bark removed. Despite being an important tree for Ainu culture, its numbers are declining drastically. More recently, the residents of Biratori-cho started to facilitate the planting of this tree within the town's forests. This initiative is gathering attention as an effort to secure and stabilize the source of materials needed for Ainu craft.



Photo 4: *Attus-amip*: Ainu clothing made of bark of *atni* (lobed elm) and *nipesni* (linden) trees. It's said that the *chikisani* bark (*Ulmus davidiana*) was also used.

much over the ages and the *Abies sachalinensis* on the slope and on the ridge trail also show very little change. However, the quantity of these trees have been declining, thus it is necessary to plant and help its natural regeneration.

"Cultural landscapes of the Saru Valley formed by Ainu tradition and modern development"
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