



Kyushu, Japan: Takachiho Gorge Olle Walk

Leader: Alan Sauran

Date: 29th October 2019

Participants: Alan Sauran, Warwick Blake, Carolyn Blake, John Colyer, Lynne Outhred, Robyn Christie, Janette Allan, Julie Rea, Betty Chow



Report:

"A snake" exclaimed Robyn, right on cue. I had just finished explaining that, during a prewalk several weeks earlier, Suzanne and I had seen three small grey snakes. Two had been cuddling in an irrigation channel. A third lone one had fallen down a hill, landed at our feet, reared its head as if to say "so I fell down a hill, what are you staring at", and honour restored, slithered off into the nearby tea plantation bushes. Now another one had appeared on the Takachiho Gorge Olle group walk when it heard its name.

The group walk started at our no-frills business ryokan in central Takachiho City. Having sought snake protection and blessing for our Olle walk at Takachiho Shrine set in a forest of ancient cedars, the group of nine descended bravely into a deep basalt organ pipe gorge the hard way, i.e. on foot. The easy way was by the rowing boats we could see far below.



Hang on. An Olle walk in Japan? How can that be right?

Yes, I know what you're thinking. "Olle" walks are a series of interlinked nature and village walks which circle around Jeju Island in South Korea. And "Olle" is a Jeju dialect word meaning "alley at my front door". How can there be an "Olle" walk in Japan? Good question. Yes, it's confusing.

Walk description:

Basalt columns gorge, rice fields, bamboo forest, tea plantations.

Easy Grade 3, 12 kms, 400m ascent, same descent, 4.5 hours plus stops. Map: Takachiho Tourist Office sketch map



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The answer is that the South Korean Olle walks have joined up with like-minded "friendship trails" in other countries. The Cotswold Way in England is another Olle friendship trail, and it also passes through nature and villages. There are 10 Olle friendship trails in Kyushu Japan. Unlike the Jeju trail and the Cotswold Way, they aren't linked into a single through walk. The Takachiho Gorge Olle walk is one of those 10.

Some other things in common between Jeju Island and Kyushu:

- * they're both volcanic islands
- * they're a lot closer to each other than Kyushu is to Tokyo
- * they're both within range of ballistic missile tests from a neighbouring country where independent recce bushwalking is discouraged.

True to the walk description, we saw a deep basalt columns gorge, rice straw stacked to dry in the fields, forests of giant bamboo and neatly shaven rows of tea bushes.

Julie needed to leave the group after completing the gorge section. She hitchhiked safely back into town, using fluent hand signals and a business card from our hotel.

Whether the group saw any more snakes and what the snakes may have been doing is private to the walk and stays on the walk. But it can be revealed that after the walk we bathed in pairs in the Japanese bath to save water and time.

