

Highway distance markers

The Edo Era shogunate, using Nihonbashi, a central location in Edo as the starting point, maintained a network of highways to and from the capital. In 1604, Okubo Nagayasu had highway distance markers constructed at 4 kilometer intervals. In the measurements of those days, one “ri” was 4 kilometers long, and so the distance markers were called “ichi-ri-zuka”.

The markers were large-scale mounds flanking both sides of the highway. The flat plane was some 9 meters long, and the height was 3 meters high. They served as milestones for travelers, but also had hackberry trees planted on top in order to provide shade in summertime.

What is now Hino City had two such markers: one at Manganji, the other at Hinodai. Today, the one on the south side of the Koshu Highway at Manganji still exists, but the one on the north side was demolished in 1968.

The road, the ferry, and the post town

In the beginning, the Koshu Highway crossed the Tama River between a place called Aoyagi (now Kunitachi) and Manganji by way of the ferry based at Manganji. Once the river was crossed and the distance marker at Manganji was behind them, travelers arrived at the post town of Hino. The Manganji marker, or “ichiri-zuka”, was some 9 “ri” (about 36 kilometers) from the highway’s starting point at Nihonbashi, in the heart of Edo. Among the travelers using the Koshu Highway were feudal lords going or coming from their obligatory stint in Edo and officials in charge of transporting highly valued ceramic jars filled with tea.

In later years, from about 1684, travelers re-routed their itineraries from the upriver crossing near the post town of Hino, though the Manganji ferry crossing and the road through Hino still saw traffic.

Excavating and repairing the distance marker

In 2003, the existing milestone, or “ichiri-zuka”, on the south side of the Koshu Highway was probed and surveyed to determine its scale and structure. It measured 9 meters by 3 meters high, the standard for markers of its kind. The longitudinal surface follows the contours of the road, and is somewhat curved.

As for the interior structure, the surroundings were excavated as far down as a layer of sand and gravel. Clay-type soil with lots of sand mixed in was layered to make the mound. Protecting the mound, the road and its border were piled with three layers of rocks. On top of the rocks, a layer of ash from the eruption of Mt. Fuji in 1707 was firmly identified, meaning that the mound itself pre-dates the eruption date.

Traces of the section of the Koshu Highway adjacent to the no longer existing north side mound, 5.4 meters wide, were also discovered. After the survey was completed, the top of the remaining mound was replanted with hackberry trees and an assortment of grasses, partly to protect it and partly to enliven the image of the milestone from olden days. In the course of reconstruction, the highway's width was reduced from its original 5.4 meters to 4 meters.