

Balloon Bomb Tour in the North Ibaraki Geopark Plan

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The North Ibaraki Geopark Plan has been conducting tours at the Izura Kaigan geosite, highlighting the balloon bomb launching base, since its certification of the Japan Geopark Network in 2011. By making the war heritage the main subject of the tour, it became a unique tour unlike any other geoparks. In the beginning, some critics argued that it was unsuitable for a tour in a geopark because it was based on the negative legacy of war. However, considering that "dark tourism" is gaining attention as a sightseeing tour of war heritage today, balloon bomb tours may be ahead of the times. In this presentation, we will introduce the actual balloon bomb tour and consider the significance of introducing dark tourism to a geopark.

Balloon bombs were planned by the Japanese Army in the late Pacific War as a mission to use jet streams to attack the continental United States directly. Between November 1944 and April 1945, it is estimated that 9,300 shots were released, of which at least 1,000 reached the North American continent. At the time, balloons were launched from 42 launch pads at the bases on the Pacific coast near Otsu, Ibaraki Prefecture, near Nakoso, Fukushima Prefecture, and at Ichinomiya Beach in Chiba Prefecture. The only surviving launch pad is Otsu at the Izura Kaigan geosite.

In the balloon bomb tour, the only remaining launch pad will be visited, the natural conditions selected as the launch base will be examined while observing the surrounding landform, etc., and the principle will be explained using a balloon bomb scale model. At the same time, it introduces the social impact of the area when the base was set up. From a geological point of view, the sand on the shore used for the weight mounted on the balloon bomb is presented. The U.S. military performed a geological analysis of the sand to determine where the balloon bombs were launched. The launch location could not always be pinpointed, but a rough estimate of the Pacific coast of eastern Japan was being made. Geology is one example of the use of war. Balloon bomb launch pad is a negative legacy of war, but it is important to observe it and consider the relationship between war and academic research and contribute to world peace.

Dark tourism is a new concept of tourism proposed at the end of the 20th century, and is defined as a journey through memories of tragedies such as wars and disasters. In recent years, tours to learn about natural disasters in geoparks in Japan have been attracting attention. However, memories of war are hard to incorporate into tourism in the traditional sense, and have not been actively incorporated into geoparks. We want to expand the possibilities of geoparks by incorporating a new tourism concept called dark tourism, which is attracting worldwide attention, into geoparks.

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