

A study of roles of trail signs for foreign climbers at Mt. Fuji

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1. Introduction & Aim Mt Fuji is a composite volcano in Fuji-Hakone-Izu, the most visited national park in Japan. The number of climbers increased rapidly in 2008, with estimates of over 300,000 exceeding past records. This included a large increase in foreign climbers, reflecting national inbound trends, but there has been little monitoring of foreign climbers and few attempts to manage their climbing experience. One vital interface between national park managers and visitors are trail signs; the role of this fundamental method of communication will be examined in this paper from a foreign climber perspective.

2. Methodology. An English questionnaire was distributed at Fuji-Yoshida, traditionally the most popular of the 4 main trailheads, to target foreign climbers on their descent. A total of 439 questionnaires were collected over 4 days in August, the peak month. As well as monitoring socio-economic trends, questionnaires investigated the roles of trail signs; a key form of communication employed by national park managers to direct climbers by providing distances to destinations, identify facilities, warn climbers of dangers, educate climbers, interpret interesting natural features and list regulations.

3. Results. The lack of existing data on foreign climbers first necessitated a socio-economic profile, shown in Table 1. The usefulness of trail signs was respectable, with an overall 6.4 on the Likert scale from 1-10. 53% also concurred that the number of trail signs was just right and of the six core roles of trail signs mentioned above, only Interpretation was found insufficient, with a refusal rate of 65%. Despite the bias of the English questionnaire, these results offer a foreign perspective on the roles of trail signs, highlighting essential improvement areas such as the descent route, especially around Edoya Hut. Interpretation and Distance functions of trail signs need improvement.

Table 1. Climber profile
64% SEX - MALE
64% AGE - 20s
92% 1st FUJI ASCENT
79% REACHED SUMMIT
82% NO GUIDE
AVG EXPENDITURE \13313

4. Conclusions. Renovating trail signs is symbolic of the sustained cooperative effort required to draw up a comprehensive management plan for Mt Fuji given the recent movement towards World Heritage Cultural designation. This research has profiled foreign climbers and investigated the role trail signs play for this expanding visitor segment, providing data that can be used as a consensus-building tool among local stakeholders, offering recommendations for dispersal of limited budgets and encouraging effective management.

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