



Teshio River Canoe Journey

天塩川

Canoeing Map


1:25000






4-7 days

Time




175km

Distance




4/10

Difficulty




2/5

Remoteness



3/5

Water clarity



May-Oct

Best season

The Great Teshio River Journey (天塩川旅) is one of Japan's iconic multi-day canoe trips, located in northern Hokkaido. With 160km of dam- and weir-free paddling, it's the longest uninterrupted canoe trip in Japan. Paddlers can expect to see native Hokkaido deer, plenty of kingfishers, and white-tailed eagles along the way, as they re-trace the steps of Hokkaido's earliest Japanese settlers. With small towns along the river, camping is easy and re-stocking is a breeze. There's also hot-spring facilities en route, easily accessible on foot from canoe ports on the river. Daily distances are around 20km and the rapids are easily navigable even for beginner paddlers.

LOCATION
Teshio River flows from south to north, and is located at the far northern end of Hokkaido – the river mouth, flowing into the Japan Sea on the western coast, is only 60km from Wakkanai, Hokkaido's northern-most city.

Put-in location: For the longest trip down the Teshio River with reliable water levels, put in just below the rock weir in Shibetsu City (士別市). This will allow a full 175km down-river trip. Putting in in Shibetsu City will, however, require at least one considerable portage around a weir. That is to say, there are two weirs between Shibetsu City and Nayoro City, the first of which is sometimes open –

in this case it doesn't need to be portaged. If you'd rather not deal with portaging at all, then put in at Nayoro-ohashi Bridge (名寄大橋). This will allow for 150km of uninterrupted paddling to the sea.

Take-out location: If paddling all the way to the coast, take out just before the river mouth proper at the sheltered boat ramp in Teshio Township (天塩町). Note, however, that the last 20km from Teshio-ohashi Bridge (天塩大橋) to Teshio Township on the coast is almost impossible (and quite dangerous) with strong headwinds from the coast blowing – which is often the case. Guidebooks caution of ocean-like waves on this 20km flat-water section of river. For this reason, most paddlers will take out either on river right at Teshio-ohashi Bridge or further upstream at the canoe port at Nakagawa Town or Toikanbetsu (問寒別). Regardless of where one chooses to take out, the river is never very far from the Japan Rail Soya Train Line, so access is relatively good. It's worth noting that for the 20km beyond Teshio-ohashi to the river mouth is quite limited in convenient locations to take out.

GENERAL NOTES
There's deep historical significance in the Teshio River. Along the way, canoeists will be re-tracing the steps of one of Japan's most famous domestic explorers, Matsuura Take-shiro (松浦武四郎). In 1857, guided by local Ainu, Matsuura travelled up the Teshio, making geographical and cultural observations along the way. It was from this journey that Matsuura came up with the name Hokkaido. The Teshio's main claim to fame for canoeists, however, is its 160km of uninterrupted flow. This makes it one of the longest weir-free canoe journeys in Japan. The name 'Teshio' comes from the indigenous Ainu word 'tesh', which means 'beam'. Used in the context of the Teshio River (tesh-o-pet), the word refers to the unique river-wide angled ledges found along the length of the river. These ledges form interesting sideways-flow rapids that take some getting used to.

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES
This six- to seven-day itinerary below assumes crack-of-noon starts, relaxed camp-fire evenings, and a bit of paddling each day. Dedicated paddlers who prefer crack-of-dawn starts and long days at the helm could easily smash the route out in four days – as we did, with a very favourable weather window. The latter point is key. With a headwind on the last 30km, you'll be going nowhere fast. Paddlers can, naturally, shorten the trip by putting in lower than Nayoro, and taking out at Nakgawa or sooner.

DAY 1 – Shibetsu City to Nayoro City | *25km, 1.2mpk, Portages: 1-2* | Starting just below the rock weir near the Cycling Terminal, head downstream to the Kenbuchi River confluence. As if to make up for the dreary weir portages on this section, there's a lovely 2km section of river in the middle of the day with gorgeous bedrock. There are deep channels in the bed-rock, so find those and you might make it through without getting out of your canoe. Otherwise, enjoy the ankle-deep river walking on flat, even, grippy rock flowing with clear water. Both portages are typical awkward Hokkaido portages – steep concrete banks and tricky re-entries. Take a deep breath and get them over and done with. Camp at the far end of the park golf area just upstream of Nayoro-ohashi Bridge (名寄大橋). There's concrete steps leading up from the river.

DAY 2 – Nayoro City to Bifuka Island | *35km, 0.83mpk* | A warm hot-spring soak awaits paddlers at the end of Day 2. But to get there, you'll navigate frequent naname-tesshi – angled ledges (drops) across the width of the river. The Rokkyo-tesshi (六郷テツシ) just beyond Bifuka Village stood out to us as particularly tricky – pull up on the right to scout this one. Another large tesshi is the Monpon-ai-no-se (モンポナイの瀬) just before Bifuka Island. Scout all tesshi if necessary from the riverside. That said, we found a good reading of the river allowed us to scoot through the gaps in the ledges. There are some exciting Class II rapids along the way too, but most simply require pointing the canoe downstream and following the flow. Camp at the Bifuka Island canoe port or the official campground just over the stopbanks, and enjoy and onsen only a few minutes walk away.

DAY 3 – Bifuka Island to Otoineppu Village | *24km, 1.13mpk* | A bit more of the same on this section – enjoyable fast flowing river with a few easy Class II rapids to keep things interesting. We looked longingly at Teshio-gawa Onsen as we passed by – visiting later by car confirmed that it would be a gorgeous place to camp. With a stiff following wind, we decided to forgo staying in Otoineppu (at the free Nakajima Park Campground) and pushed on to combine Day 3 and Day 4 below into one long day (about 10 hours total on the water).

DAY 4 – Otoineppu Village to Nakagawa | *33km, 0.70mpk* | This deep-valley section between Otoineppu and Nakagawa offers some of the more dramatic scenery of the journey. Deeply forested hills frame a now deep and wide waterway, snaking its way through the mountains. With some aesthetic low cloud, this is a gorgeously moody section of river. Camp at the Nakagawa Napoto

Park Auto Campground with attached onsen hotspring. In this section, paddlers will notice the gradual transformation of the river from a fast-flowing descent to a more grandiose body of water coursing towards the sea. Indeed, by the time you arrive in Nakagawa, you're at 9m in altitude, still with almost 60km still to paddle to the coast.

DAY 5 – Nakagawa to Penkebira Bend Gravel Bar | *20km, 0.25mpk* | Where to camp and how far to travel each day from Nakagawa to the coast is 100% dependent on the wind direction and wind strength. Here, we suggest taking it easy, and enjoy one last good river camping spot before the uncertainty and mind-numbing monotony of the final 40km of flat-water paddling. On the way, you'll also see the last of the swifts. Camp at the raised Penkebira Bend gravel bar.

DAY 6 – Penkebira Bend Gravel Bar to Teshio-ohashi Bridge | *22km, 0.14mpk* | The clear highlight of this section – if the weather is clear – is seeing the top of Rishiri-zan (利尻山, 1721m), an off-shore island volcano. Such a view should invigorate the paddler into wanting to see an uninterrupted view of it from the coast, despite the ever-deteriorating speed of the river's flow. If the weather gods have bestowed upon the dear paddler completely calm conditions or better yet tailwinds, we'd suggest setting off at dawn and smashing through the 40km of Day 6 and 7. Such weather windows are few and far between. Otherwise, make the day's 22km to Teshio-ohashi Bridge and consider your options. We've seen enough warnings in multiple guidebooks to suggest the gargantuan lower section of the Teshio River is no place to be with a strong wind, whipping up dangerous waves.

DAY 7 – Teshio-ohashi Bridge to the Japan Sea | *18km, 0.1mpk* | It's best to greet today as if you've got 18km of lake paddling to do. Pray for a tailwind, rather than the stiff and persistent onshore southwester. If things do go your way with the weather, and a full tide isn't making the river flow backwards, then this last spurt section of river can be quite stunning in its sheer expanse. With only 7km to go to the finish line, you'll be able to clamber over the sand dunes and get a glimpse of a crystal-clear Japan Sea and with luck, Rishiri Island. If it's not too windy and choppy, take out at the dedicated canoe port. Otherwise, there's a more sheltered boat ramp another 100m down the river. Both are accessible by car. Camp at the gorgeous Kagaminuma Park Campground (鏡沼公園キャンプ場) in Teshio Town, with the Teshio Onsen right next door. For paddlers traveling by public transport, it may be more convenient just to camp in the

riverside park near the canoe port, still only a 10 minute walk from the Teshio Onsen.

TRANSPORT
By car | There's plenty of parking at the take-out in Teshio Town and put-in at Shibetsu City. All the canoe ports along the river are accessible by car. See the public transport section for advice on the public transport shuttle for those traveling in only one car.
Public transport | To get to the put-in at Shibetsu City (士別市), take a train from anywhere in Hokkaido to Shibetsu Station (士別駅) on the JR Soya Line (JR宗谷線) bound for Wakkanai (稚内). From Shibetsu Station it's about a 20 minute walk (2.5km) to the river. If you're traveling in one car, then you'll likely leave your car at the takeout point in Teshio Town on the coast and need to get back to the put-in. Take any of the local buses from the Teshio (てしお) bus stop here (on the western side of the road), headed for either Toyotomi-eki (豊富駅) or Shinchiso (深地層). The bus stop is about 5 minutes walk from the river in Teshio Town. Get off at Horonobe JR Station, and catch the express train to Shibetsu (士別市). The JR Soya Line runs almost the entire length of the river, so if at any time you need to get off the river and catch a train further down the route, it's usually possible to do so.

SAFETY NOTES
At normal water levels, the Teshio River Journey is billed in most guidebooks as suitable for beginners. We'd concur with this assessment, even with slightly elevated river levels – the extra water would make the naname-tesshi angled drops more manageable. That said, beginners should be conservative in decision making – the Teshio is a massive river with very little shelter from the wind. Be prepared

Japanese Map Glossary		
Romaji	Kanji	English
bunki	分岐	junction
cho	町	town
dake/mine	岳/峯	peak
eki	駅	station
goya/koya	小屋	hut
hinangoya	避難小屋	shelter
ike	池	pond
kawa/gawa	川	river
kako	火口	crater
ko/mizumi	湖	lake
kyo	峡	gorge
numa	沼	pond
onsen	温泉	hot spring
sawa	沢	stream
taira/daira	平	plateau
tani/dani	谷	valley
taki	滝	waterfall
toge	峠	pass
yama/san/zan	山	mountain

RIVER DETAILS

This route is on Teshio River (天塩川), or Tesh-o-pet in the Ainu indigenous language. The river is a Class A (一級河川) river, 256km in total length. This section of the river is between 20m and 200m wide. The gradient for this section of river is 0.71 mpk (3.75 FPM).

Water level notes: Generally speaking, paddlers will have no issues with water level beyond Nayoro City. From Shibetsu to Nayoro, however, paddlers may encounter shallow sections of bedrock when water levels are low (below around 88.3m as measured at Nayoro). If anything, the river becomes easier to navigate in higher water levels. Lower water levels require some careful reading of the river, particularly at the numerous *naname-tesshi*. These river-wide angled ledges will usually have a gap (or gaps) somewhere along their length, but it's up to the canoeist to find it.


to shelter at an un-serviced canoe port overnight to wait out bad weather if necessary. At the very least, be familiar with river self-rescue techniques.

ONSEN NEARBY
There's a number of onsen along the way on this route – see the campgrounds section in the online guide for links, locations, and details. Our pick of the bunch for views and atmosphere are the Teshio-gawa Onsen (天塩川温泉) half way thorough the route, and Teshio Onsen (てしお温泉) at the end of the route.

OFFICIAL RIVER MAP (IN JAPANESE):
<http://hokw.jp/tesshi-jp> ■

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDE

Please visit the full route guides for GPS files, interactive maps, and extra safety notes: <http://hokw.jp/tesshi>



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MAR, TEXT, PHOTOS | Rob Thomson

hokkaidowilds.org 2020/10/06

MAR FOLD & LAYOUT CONCEPT | Dominika Gan

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Symbol Key (some may not be present)

- Route (distance between points)
- National Highway
- Prefectural Road
- Municipal Road
- Minor Municipal Road
- Walkway
- Designated campsite
- Put in/take out location
- Dam/waterfall/weir
- Contour lines (100m, 10m)
- Power transmission lines
- Trees/no trees
- Rocks/cliffs
- Onsen (hot spring)
- Fumerole
- Highway number
- Distance to river mouth
- Rapids

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDES - Please visit the full route guides for route description, GPS files, and safety notes: <https://hokw.jp/tesshi>

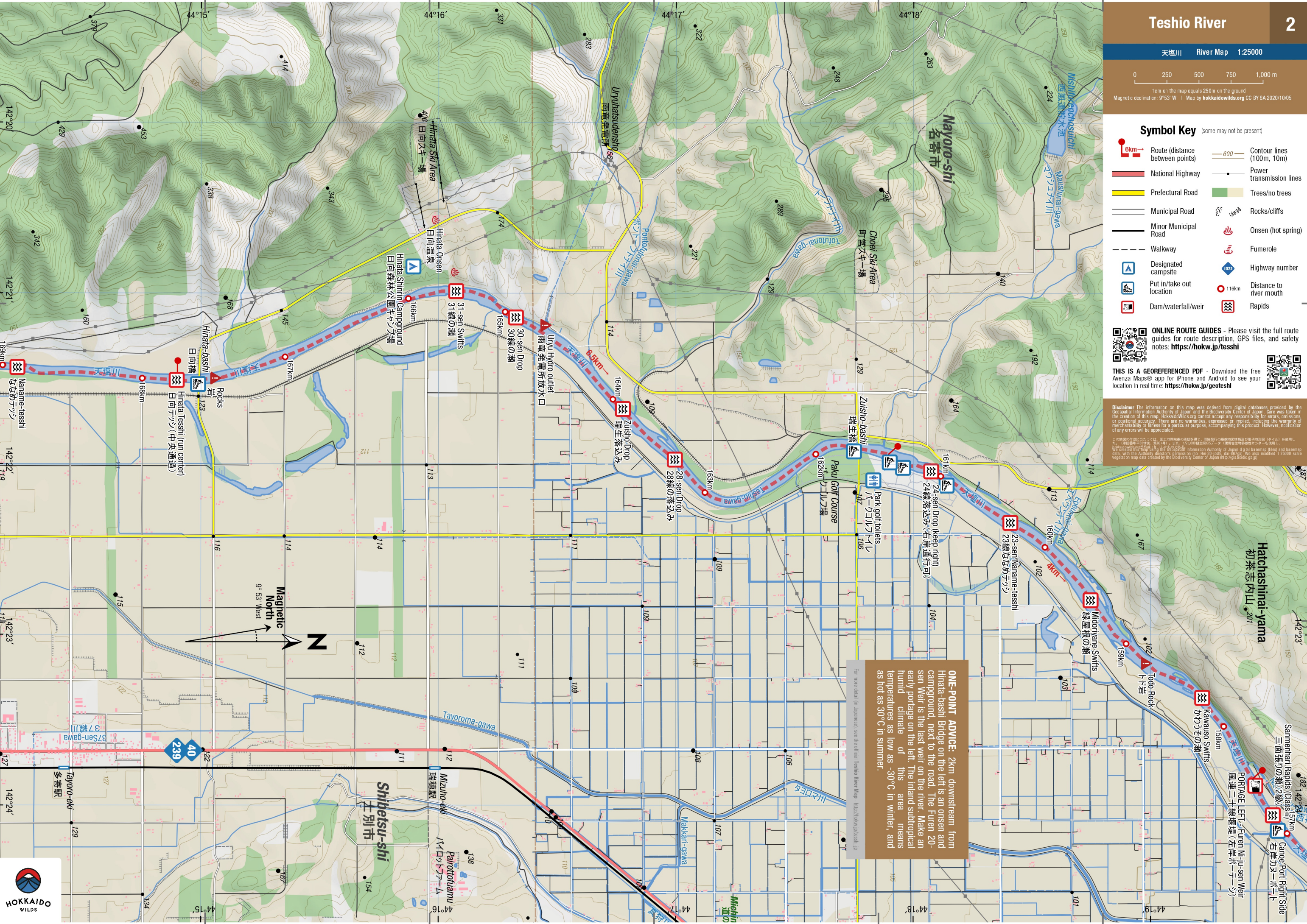
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ONE-POINT ADVICE: 2km downstream from Hinata-bashi Bridge on the left is an onsen and campground, next to the road. The Furen 20-sen Weir is the last weir on the river. Make an early portage on the left. The inland subtropical humid climate of this area means temperatures as low as -30°C in winter, and as hot as 30°C in summer.

For more detail (in Japanese), see the official Teshio River Map: <http://hokw.jp/tesshi.jp>





Symbol Key (some may not be present)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| | Route (distance between points) | | Contour lines (100m, 10m) |
| | National Highway | | Power transmission lines |
| | Prefectural Road | | Trees/no trees |
| | Municipal Road | | Rocks/cliffs |
| | Minor Municipal Road | | Onsen (hot spring) |
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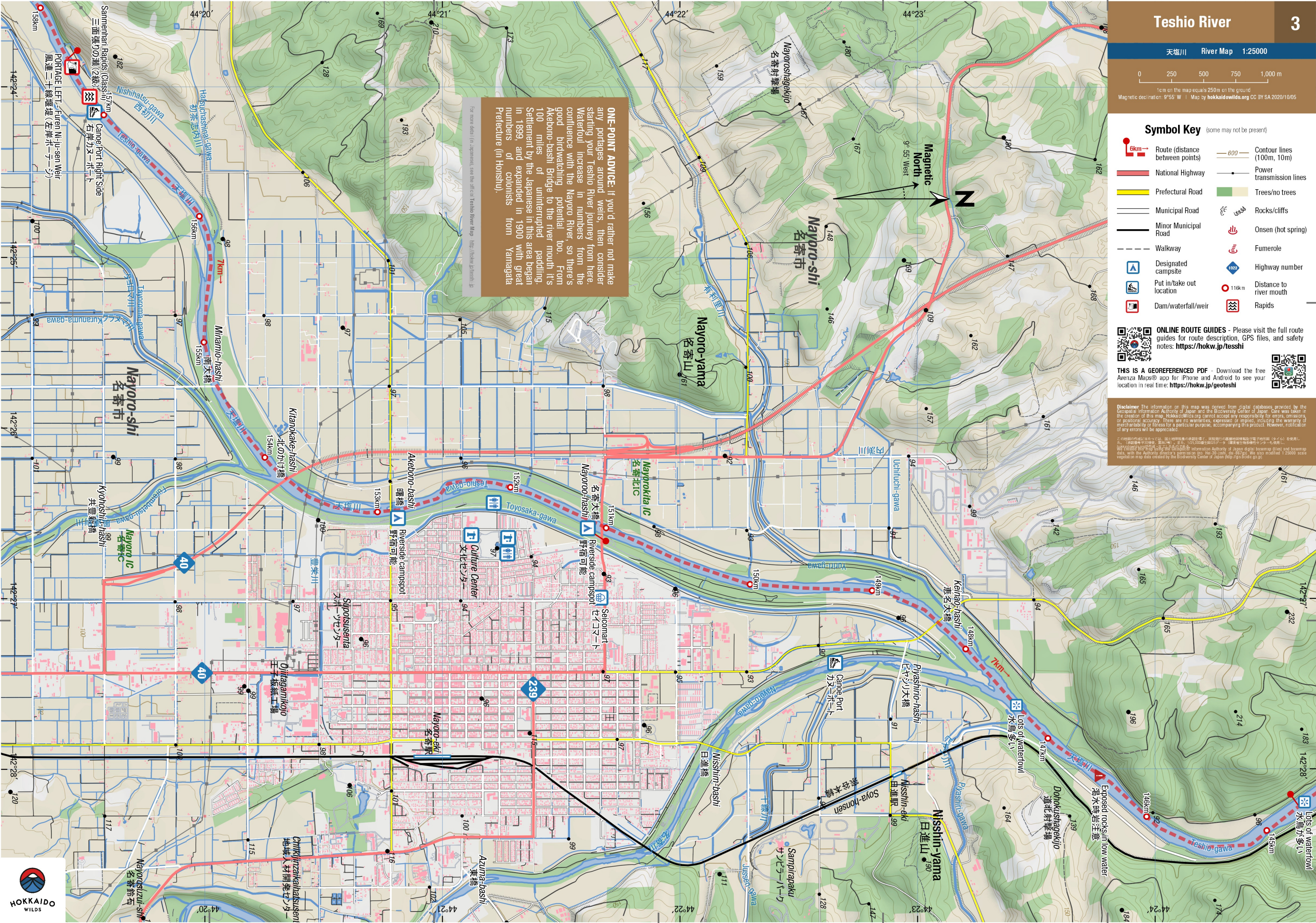
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ONE-POINT ADVICE: If you'd rather not make any portages around weirs, then consider starting your Teshio River journey from here. Waterfowl increase in numbers from the confluence with the Nayoro River, so there's good birdwatching potential too. From Akebono-bashi Bridge to the river mouth it's 100 miles of uninterrupted paddling. Settlement by the Japanese in this area began in 1899, and expanded in 1900 with great numbers of colonists from Yamagata Prefecture (in Honshu).

For more detail (in Japanese), see the official Teshio River Map: <http://hokw.jp/tesshi.jp>



For more detail (in Japanese), see the official **Teshio River Map** - <http://hokw.jp/tesshi-jp>

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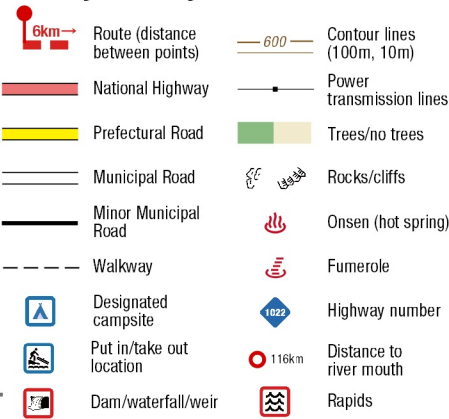
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5

1:25000

1cm on the map equals 250m on the ground
Magnetic declination: 9°58' W | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2020/10/05

Symbol Key (some may not be present)



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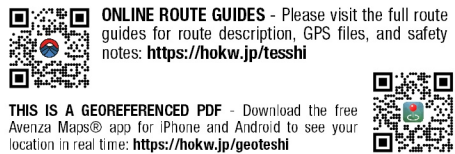
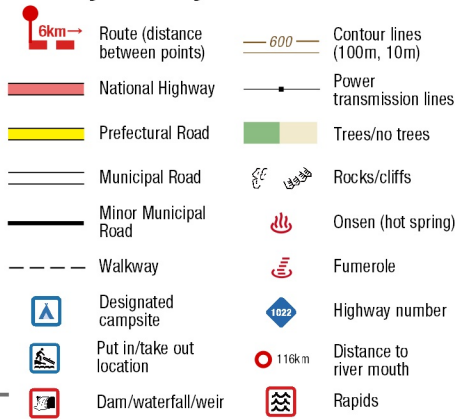
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ONE-POINT ADVICE: On this section, paddlers can take the left or right islands just downstream from the E Bridge. The swifts downstream basin Bridge are shallow, so take care on the Rokko-yesshi Rapid - and if in doubt portage on the right.

For more details (in Japanese), see the official Teshio River Map - <http://mokuw.jp/teshio-jp>



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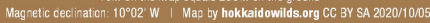


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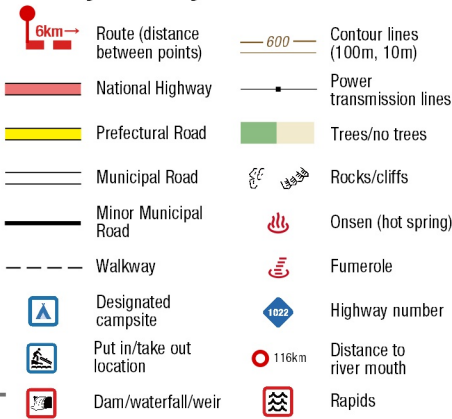
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ONE-POINT ADVICE: Take care on the Monpou-no-se Rapid. If in doubt portage well in advance. Evidence of human settlement in this area dates back to the Satsumon Era (7th till 13th Century AD). Early Japanese explorer Matsura Takeshiro traveled up the Teshio and Nayoro Rivers in 1857 with the assistance of local Ainu. His 'Teshio Diary' of the journey is well preserved, and documents his geographical survey work, and observations of Ainu lifestyles.



Magnetic declination: 10°02' W | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2020/10/05

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ONE-POINT ADVICE: In the valley section there's no bridges or places to escape from the river. Headwinds are common in the afternoon, so plan accordingly. There's a good spot to camp on the right bank near Saku-bashi Bridge.

For more detail (in Japanese), see the official Teshio River Map - <http://hokw.jp/teshi.jp>

7km to Nakagawa Canoe Port | 中川カヌーポートまで7km

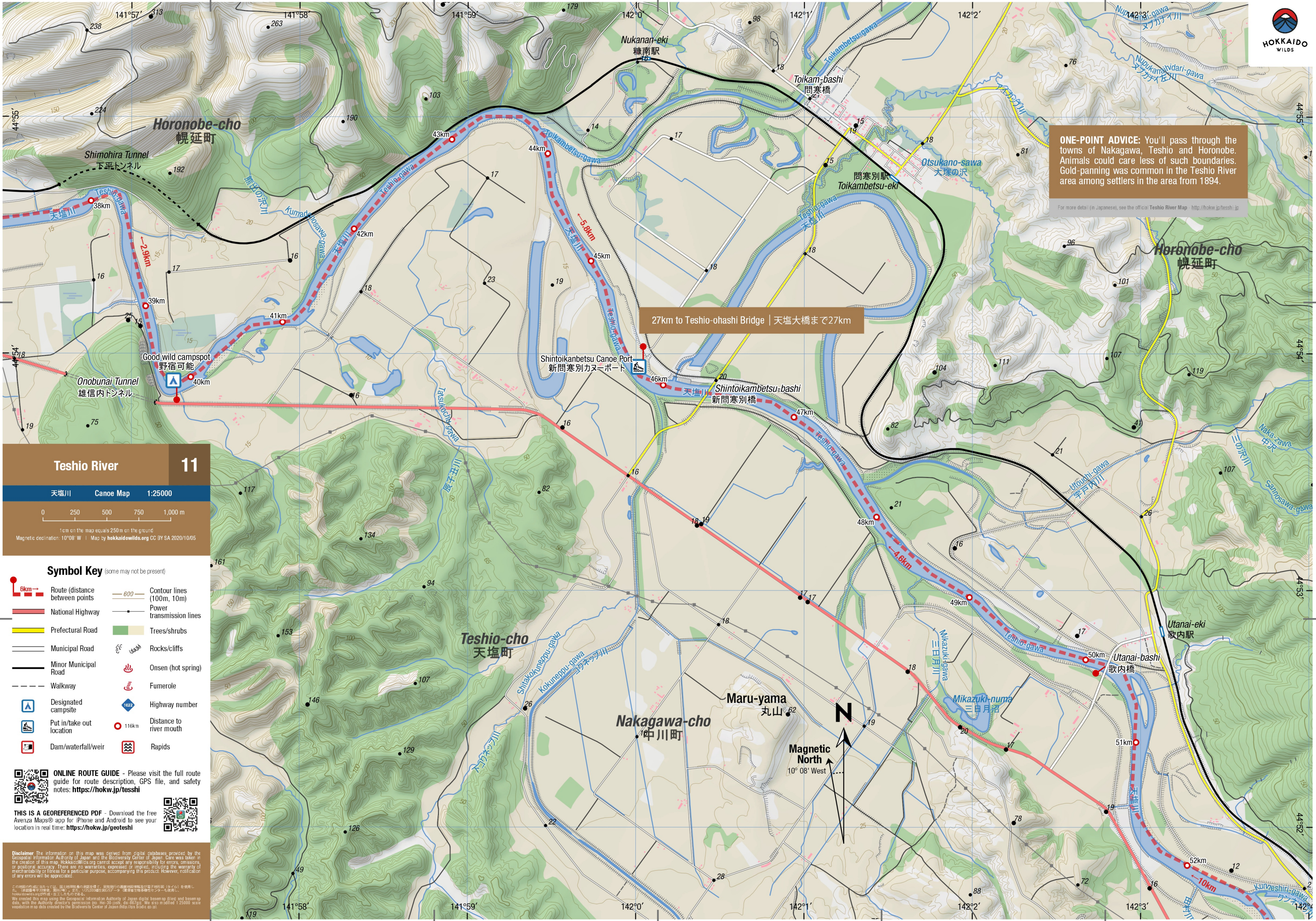
From here, downstream - large waves when windy
この辺から風で波が高くなる事あり

From Otoineppu downstream headwinds common
Double paddle for open-deck canoe recommended
音威子府より下流では向風強し
オープンデッキの場合ダブルパドルを用意すると良い

Strong eddy lines
大渦危険

ONE-POINT ADVICE: You'll pass through the towns of Nakagawa, Teshio and Horonobe. Animals could care less of such boundaries. Gold-panning was common in the Teshio River area among settlers in the area from 1894.

For more detail (in Japanese), see the official Teshio River Map <http://hokw.jp/tesshi.jp>



Teshio River

11

天塩川 Canoe Map 1:25000

0 250 500 750 1,000 m

1cm on the map equals 250m on the ground
Magnetic declination: 10°08' W | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY-SA 2020/10/05

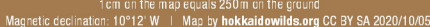
- Symbol Key** (some may not be present)
- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| | Route (distance between points) | | Contour lines (100m, 10m) |
| | National Highway | | Power transmission lines |
| | Prefectural Road | | Trees/shrubs |
| | Municipal Road | | Rocks/cliffs |
| | Minor Municipal Road | | Onsen (hot spring) |
| | Walkway | | Fumerole |
| | Designated campsite | | Highway number |
| | Put in/take out location | | Distance to river mouth |
| | Dam/waterfall/weir | | Rapids |

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDE - Please visit the full route guide for route description, GPS file, and safety notes: <https://hokw.jp/tesshi>

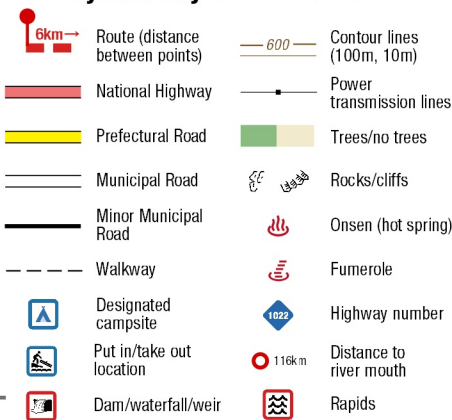
THIS IS A GEOREFERENCED PDF - Download the free Avenza Maps® app for iPhone and Android to see your location in real time: <https://hokw.jp/geoteshi>

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Symbol Key (some may not be present)



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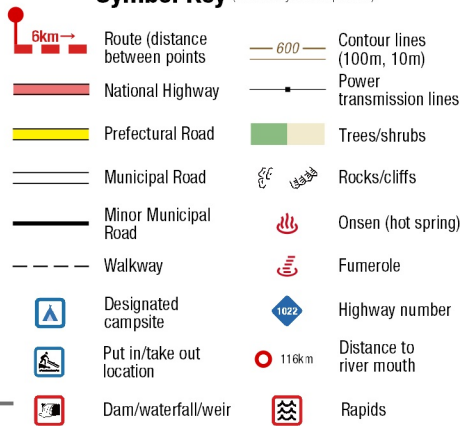
We created this map using the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan digital basemap (Nies) and basemap data, with the Authority director's permission (no. Hei-30-joshi, dai-867no). We also modified 1:25000 scale vegetation map data created by the Biodiversity Center of Japan (<http://gis.biodic.go.jp/>).

ONE-POINT ADVICE: On the lower Teshio river, once you're past Onopunai-Ohashi Bridge, there's only three bridges between there and the river mouth. Take-out points are limited and re-supply points are very limited. Furthermore, the river essentially stops flowing. Before bridges were built across the wide lower reaches of the Teshio, from the early 1900's onwards, there were ten cable ferries carrying people, luggage, and livestock across the river.



1 cm on the map equals 250m on the ground
Magnetic declination: 10°14' W | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2020/10/05

Symbol Key (some may not be present)



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ONE-POINT ADVICE: From here to the river mouth, it's a matter of strength and willpower. If it's a tailwind, it'll be easy going, but winds from the sea make forward progress difficult. The wind is often strong around here, so we'd recommend carrying an umbrella to use as a sail when the winds are right. The river widens considerably past Teshio-ohashi Birdge. Waves can appear quickly with strong headwinds and westerlies. Have the courage to cut your trip short should the wind get too much to handle. From around the early 1900's, great volumes of lumber was floated down the lower reaches of the Teshio River (from Nakagawa) during a short period of intensive forestry exploitation by settlers.

For more detail (in Japanese), see the official **Teshio River Map** - <http://hokw.jp/tesshi-jp>

Horonobe-cho
幌延町

Almost no flow from here -- beware of waves on windy days
(ほぼ流れなし(風の強い日は高波に注意))

Wild campspot 野宿可能
天塩大橋 Teshioo-hashi

From here can see Rishiri-zan
ここから利尻山が見える

Magnetic North
10° 14' West

10° 14' West

PRINTING INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1

Load your printer with A3 printer paper (297mm x 420mm). If you've only got Tabloid or Ledger size (279mm x 432 mm), just follow the instructions below. You'll achieve an accurate scale, but the map will be clipped a little at the top and bottom.

STEP 2

Open the print window by clicking on File > Print (or hitting Ctrl + P on your keyboard).

STEP 3

Make sure "Actual Size" is selected.

STEP 4

For double-sided printing, select "Print on both sides of paper".

STEP 5

For best results, select the highest quality print option available on your printer (settings will vary).

STEP 6

You won't need this instructions page, so just select the pages that don't include this instruction sheet.

STEP 7

Click "Print".

PLEASE PRINT AT 'ACTUAL SIZE' (NO SCALING)

The 1:25,000 scale used in the map is accurate if the PDF is printed without scaling (i.e., ACTUAL SIZE). Follow the instructions on this page to ensure an accurate rendering of the scale.

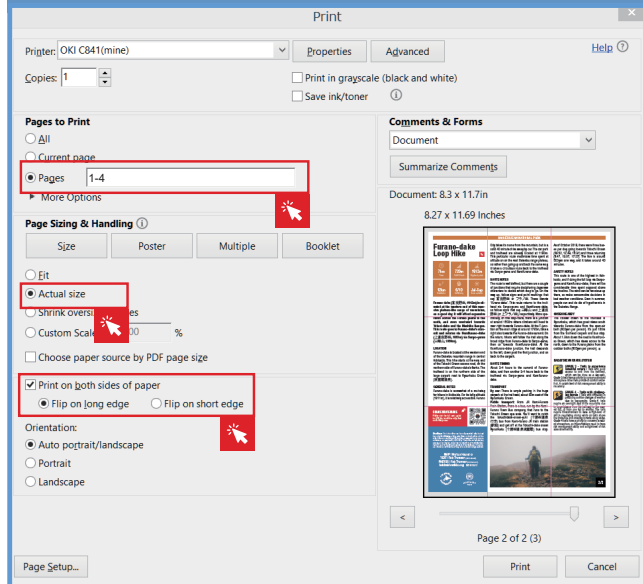
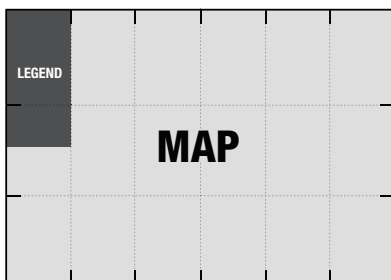


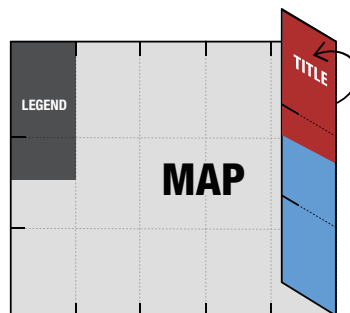
Figure 1. Ensure "Actual Size" is selected (Windows).

ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS

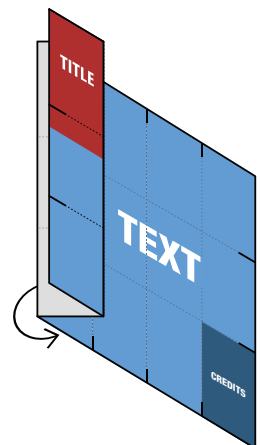
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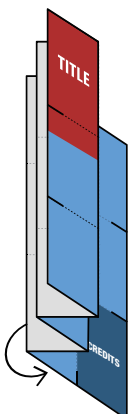
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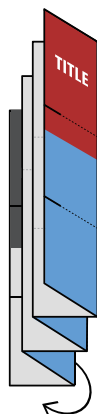
3



4



5



6



7

