




Lower
Bieia-gawa

美瑛川 Paddling Map 1:25000







4hr
Time




4.5
Gradient (mpk)




Class II+
Difficulty



22km
Distance



4/5
Water clarity



May-Oct
Best season

Biei River 美瑛川 is a gorgeous spring-fed river cascading down from the Daisetsuzan National Park in central Hokkaido. While the steeper upper reaches of the river are best suited for experienced paddlers, the lower half of the river from Biei Township towards Asahikawa City is suitable for lower-intermediate paddlers and up. For the most part, the river flows through quiet countryside, away from any large roads. With excellent rail access to the beginning and end of the route, this is a packrafter's dream.

LOCATION
The Biei River is located in the scenic central area of Hokkaido, near Asahikawa City. Also near Furano City and the Daisetsuzan Range, the river flows through some of the most picturesque rolling hills, farmland, and flower fields that Hokkaido has to offer.

Put-in: There are two convenient put-in locations for the start of the route in Biei Town. Put in just upstream of the Midori-bashi Bridge 緑橋 (literally ‘Green Bridge’) on the river right to enjoy a short but sweet Class 2 rapid to start the trip off. Alternatively, just up- or down-stream of Biei-bashi Bridge 美瑛橋 on Route 237 is also convenient, and a few hundred meters closer to Biei train station. If you’d prefer to shorten the trip considerably (and avoid portaging around the upper weir), paddlers can put in at the Kaitaku Memorial Park 開拓記念公園, about 10km downstream from Biei Town.

Take-out: If keen on a long half-day paddle, then we’d recommend taking out at the Shinkai-bashi Bridge 新開橋, a 1.5km walk from Nishikagura train station 西神楽駅. If the novelty of paddling from Biei Town into the guts of Asahikawa City appeals, then paddle the extra 8km downstream to Heisei-bashi Bridge 平成橋, an easy 10 minute (700m) walk to Kaguraoka train station 神楽岡駅. Note that there is one large weir along this extra 8km section requiring a 150m portage, and there are a number of larger Class 2+ rapids and drops along the way – i.e., just because it’s downstream, doesn’t mean the going gets easier.

GENERAL NOTES
Biei River is probably best known for the

deservedly popular tourist attractions far upstream – the majestic Blue Pond 青池 and the mesmerizing Shirahige Falls 白ひげの滝. Minerals in the water keep the river a gorgeous clear-ish blue colour most of the way down to Biei Town, so for at least part of this lower Biei River paddling section, you’ll enjoy an almost glacier-water feel to the river. Further down-stream, the water clarity suffers a little due to more urban and farmland development nearby, but it’s still quite nice. For the most part, you’ll feel quite removed from civilization as the river wends its way through the famous Biei rolling hills. In a forgiving packraft or plastic kayak there’s not too much to be concerned about, despite a number of rock gardens. This is a nice section of river to practice picking good lines through a river dotted with boulders.

Water level: Water levels can be quite low during the summer months, leading to a fairly bottom-scraping paddle on the upper half of the route. Spring and autumn after rain are the most reliable times for good water levels.

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES
A relatively leisurely four hours is a good amount of time to aim for, for the Biei to Nishikagura section of this route (to Shinkai-bashi Bridge). If paddling all the way to Asahikawa City, add on another couple of hours at least, making it a solid full day out.

Put in at either of the Biei Town upper put-ins, and immediately enjoy being whisked away into a quiet rural waterway away from the madding crowds. There are a couple of sharp blind bends on the upper section of the route before the weir. These may be hiding river-wide strainers, so take care. At lower water levels these will be high enough to duck under

CENTRAL HOKKAIDO

without getting out of your boat, but with more water in the river, these might be a little trickier.

The weir at around the 10km point is a little awkward to portage around, but it’s doable on the river left. At lower water levels you may be able to sneak into the water-sluice entrance on the far left, and clamber down the concrete embankment. If the water is up, you may need to clamber up the large sandbags on the left just before the weir, and bushbash down to the river beyond the weir. Greg and Mari reported they lined their canoe down the weir, and shimmied down the concrete ‘pillar’ in the middle of the weir. Either way, it’s a classic, sketchy, all-together inconvenient manmade monstrosity of the Hokkaido wilds that is best scouted before even getting on the river, if possible.

Beyond the weir, the boulder gardens continue, before the second large weir at the 20km point. This weir is very often open, so you can just paddle straight through. If portaging, portage on the river right. About 30m downstream of the weir is a messy concrete-block drop of about 70cm or so. Make sure to scout this before running it. We were able to run it left of center, but on either side were old, exposed, jagged, eroded, sharp concrete blocks, not visible from water level. Beyond that, there’s just one long, large boulder garden with a wave-train exit just before Shinkai-bashi Bridge, the half-day-route takeout point. The remainder 8km stretch to Asahikawa City proper does have a couple of rapids that are best scouted before running. And there’s a very large weir/dam at the 25km point that must be portaged.

TRANSPORT
By car | There is river-bank parking near the Biei-bashi Bridge put in. At the half-day-route takeout at the Shinkai-bashi Bridge 新開橋, there’s parking under the bridge accessed via a gravel road down to the river. At the far lower end of the route near Heisei-bashi Bridge, there’s a large paved parking area on the river-side.
Public transport | Biei River from Biei Town to Asahikawa City has to be one of the most accessible river runs in Hokkaido. The JR Furano train line allows access to Biei Town

RIVER DETAILS

This route is on Biei River (美瑛川), or Piye in the Ainu indigenous language. The river is a Class A (一級河川) river, 72.2km in total length. This section of the river is between 10m and 30m wide, with a normal flow rate of around 0.5m/s to 3m/s. The gradient for this section of river is 4.5 mpk (23.76 FPM).



(Biei station 美瑛駅), and then offers a number of options for escape at the lower end of the route. Just pick a station near the river and you’re guaranteed about one to two trains per hour to take you either to Asahikawa City, or back to Biei Town. Also note that Asahikawa Airport 旭川空港 is only 5km from Nishikagura JR Station, the takeout location for the half-day-route option.

SAFETY NOTES
At normal water levels, the lower Biei River is fairly placid, but paddlers should watch out for strainers on blind corners. Some of the larger rocks in the boulder gardens might also be large enough to pin a canoe, so take care. The weirs are classic drowning machines, so take extra care when approaching and portaging.

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

ONLINE ROUTE GUIDE

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



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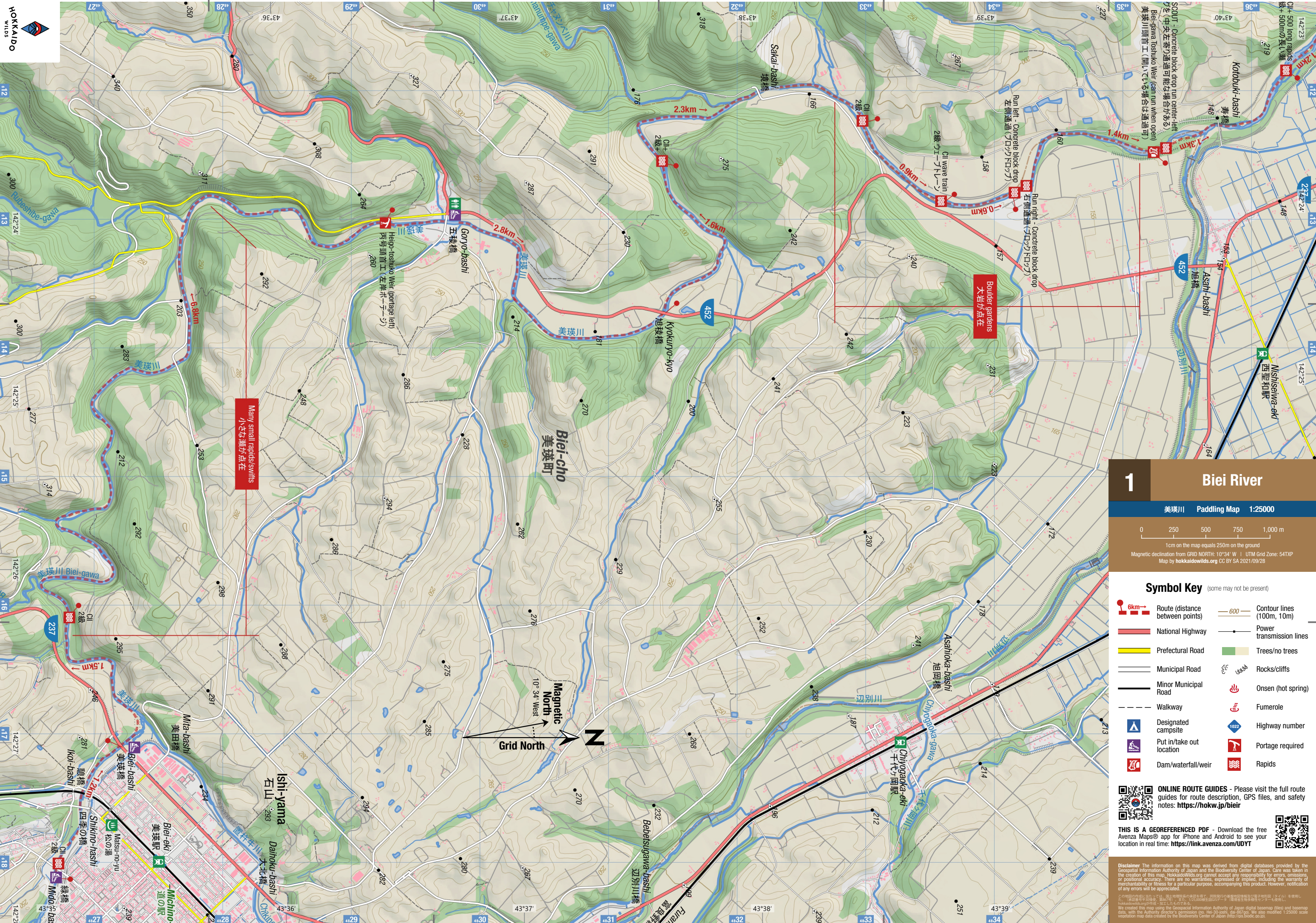
MAP, TEXT, PHOTOS | Rob Thomson

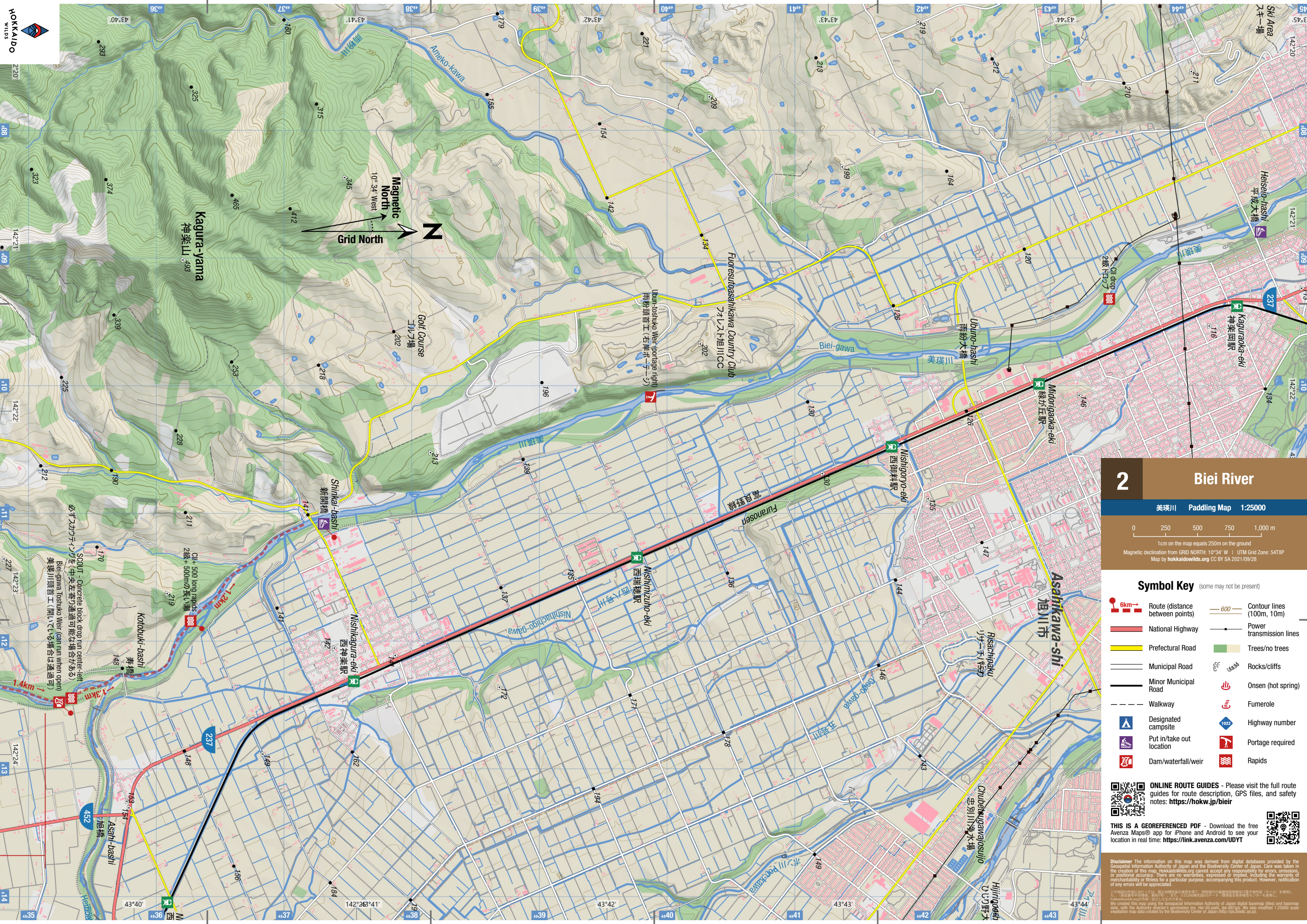
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MAP FOLD & LAYOUT CONCEPT | Dominika Gan

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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) |
|  | Walkway |  | Fumerole |
|  | Designated campsite |  | Highway number |
|  | Put in/take out location |  | Portage required |
|  | Dam/waterfall/weir |  | Rapids |



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



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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.



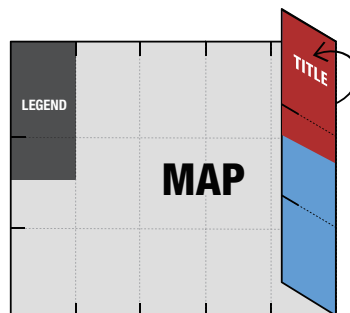
Figure 1. Ensure "Actual Size" is selected (Windows).

ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS

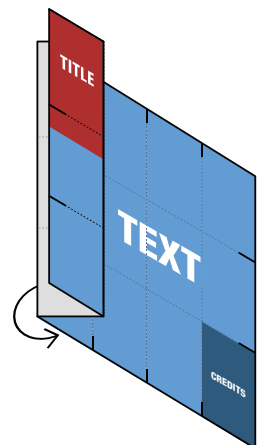
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