


Niseko Haute Route


(Niseko Range Traverse)

ニセコオートルート

Ski Touring Map


1:25000






2 days

Time




2000m

Total Climb




1308m

Highest point




31km

Distance



7/10

Difficulty



Mar-Apr

Best season

The Niseko mountain range is string of lava domes and stratovolcanoes running from the eponymous Mt Niseko-An’Nupuri in a roughly East-West orientation to the coast of Hokkaido on the Sea of Japan. A spring traverse along the Niseko range offers a great one-to-two-night introduction to under-canvas ski touring with the option to dial up, or down, the physicality by selectively bagging & skiing off peaks along the way. Often referred to by locals as the Niseko Haute Route ニセコオートルート, the tour becomes even more high-class for those who are prepared to drop down to the old Nimi onsen ruins to put together a backcountry camp-site complete with geo-thermal water.

LOCATION

The Niseko Range is in the southwest of Hokkaido, about 2.5hrs (90km) drive west of Sapporo City. It stretches east to west, from the bustling ski resort town of Niseko to the Japan Sea coast. Skiers can start the traverse at either end of the range (see more details below).

GENERAL NOTES

The moniker Niseko “Haute Route” was borrowed by locals from the European version, but the concept is the same: a multi-day, high-level ski tour route up in the alpine, ticking off as many of the major peaks in the range as possible along the way. When visibility is good – as is often the case in spring – this is an incredibly inspiring route with plenty of variation. The descents off Niseko-Annupuri, Iwaonupuri, Nitonupuri, Chisenupuri, Mekunnai-dake, and Raiden-yama are also amazing. The final descent from Raiden-yama to the sea is a particularly unique experience that caps off an amazing volcanic traverse.

Direction: Most skiers complete the traverse

east to west. That is, from Niseko to the sea. This direction involves about 20% less climbing overall (and also means 20% more downhill). Symbolically, this direction has an aesthetic appeal. The escape from the madding crowds of the resort area, all the way to the wild ocean...

Where to start: If starting in the east, most skiers start at the road-end car park near Goshiki Onsen on Route 58. A ‘true’ traverse might start at the base of any of the four major ski resorts of Niseko, however hiker access is limited on the southeast side of Niseko Annupuri – consider taking one of the first lifts (8:30am) up and hiking to the Niseko Annupuri peak from there. The King Lift #4 in the Niseko Grand Hirafu ski area gives most direct access to the peak via Gate 3. Note, however, that backcountry gate openings are not guaranteed (ass per the Niseko Rules), and the west face of Niseko-Annupuri can be horribly wind-affected and icy, particularly on early-spring mornings.

If the purist in you must hike from the base of Niseko-Annupuri, then a ridge-line hike to the west of Osawa Bowl starting from just east of the Niseko Moiwa Ski Area Center Lodge might be feasible, however make sure to start well before 8:30am, as the Osawa Bowl and Back Bowl sees a huge number of sidecountry skiers descending from first lifts.

Where to end: The Japan Sea coast side of Raiden-yama is a labyrinth of rugged cliffs, high narrow spurs, wind-stripped ridgelines, and deep, tightly wooded gullies. As such, there’s no pleasant way to finish close to Cape Raiden-misaki 雷電岬, which would, arguably, be the purist’s choice of route terminus. Therefore, most skiers opt to ski from the Raiden-yama summit due north towards Iwanai Town. Arguably the most aesthetic balance between access, skiing quality, and a true sea-side finish is to ski the ridge north from Maeraiden-yama 前雷電山 past the 997m point, just west of Narukami Falls 鳴神の滝, and northwards to the little abandoned fishing port at Shikishimanai 敷島内. There’s a small parking area there and a bus stop (6 buses daily, see Transport Options below). That ridge offers very nice skiing, if not wind-packed for most of the season.

Skiers tempted to ski down to the derelict Asahi Onsen 朝日温泉 via Raiden-toge Pass 雷電峠 and on to the derelict Raiden Onsen 雷電温泉 should expect a solid dose of adventure skiing – think steep, very narrow and tightly wooded spurs with questionable snow cover, heading into tightly wooded gullies and sketchy traverses. In theory, a descent from Raiden-yama west-southwest to the coast from Raiden-toge Pass to the coast at Rankoshi Town is also possible. However, the Rankoshi Side offers no services – the Iwanai side offers better public transport options back to Niseko, a good array of restaurant options, and even onsen.

When to go: The Niseko Traverse can be completed at any time during the ski season, from December till April. Surface and weather conditions are best in spring (March till April) – expect fast hard-pack and/or corn and good weather windows of up to 72 hours/3 days. In deep winter (December till end of February), surface conditions are as deep as they get anywhere in the world, and weather windows of more than 12 hours are rare.

Peaks along the way: Niseko-Annupuri ニセコアン

ヌプリ (1308m), Iwaonupuri イワオヌプリ (1116m), Nitonupuri ニトヌプリ (1080m), Chisenupuri チセヌプリ (1134m), Shakunage-dake シャクナゲ岳 (1074m), Shirakaba-yama 白樺山 (954m), Maemekunnai-dake 前目国内岳 (980m), Mekunnai-dake 目国内岳 (1202m), Raiden-yama 雷電山 (1211m).

Escape routes: The beauty of the Niseko Haute Route is the plethora of good escape routes along the way. If at any point you need to get out of the alpine or indeed to a public road, it’s relatively easy to do so within a couple of hours. We’ve marked the escape routes on the topomap, so take note of those during your planning phase.

Camping/accommodation: Besides Goshiki Onsen at the start (or end) of the route, there are no huts, campsites, or facilities along the way. If making this an overnight or multi-day traverse, you’ll need to plan in advance feasible places to camp in consultation with the wind direction forecast. In general, plateaus and saddles in the alpine are very exposed to the elements. Skiers may wish to sacrifice some elevation gain to drop down below the treeline to dig in for the night. The Niimi Onsen ruins 新見温泉跡地 make for a unique overnight halfway along the range – note that as of 2022 there was hot water still flowing, but all buildings have been removed (only foundations remain).

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES

Spring – 10-20hrs (1-2 days) | In spring with firm surface conditions, fit skiers have been known to ski from Goshiki to the sea, hitting all peaks along the way (30km, 2000m+ ascent), in a single one-day push of under 11 hours.

Winter – 3-4 days | In the mid-winter months, the traverse becomes a much more challenging ordeal – with shorter daylight hours, deep snow, and dramatically shorter alpine weather windows, expect up to three days or more, with relatively little

NISEKO REGION

opportunity to remain in the alpine for the duration of the traverse.

There’s up to 2,500m of total ascent, with about 15 transitions required if hitting all peaks along the way.

If starting from the resort side of Niseko-Annupuri, take a lift up to Gate 3 (Grand Hirafu ski area, King Lift #4) or Gate 2 (Annupuri ski area, Jumbo Pair Lift #4) (trail map here), and hike to the Niseko-Annupuri peak. Descend to Route 58.

If starting from the road-end on Route 58 just beyond Goshiki Onsen, park up at the large snow-cleared parking area just before the end of the snow-cleared road. Head up Iwaonupuri on the standard ascent route via the southern ridge to the looker’s left of the bowl. This is a fairly mellow ascent, and the summit is flat and quite featureless. Descend the same way. While it might tempting to descend the west side from the peak, this slope is steep, rocky, and has a number of bluffs.

Continue west towards Nitonupuri, via a picturesque rolling plateau. The climb up to the Nitonupuri summit is relatively short and straightforward. If snowpack conditions are stable, there’s a fine descent via the west face of Nitonupuri to the snowed-in Route 66. A more conservative descent would be via the broad ridge to the skier’s left (south) of the west face bowl.

For the ascent of Chisenupuri, we’ve marked on the topomap the most conservative, common route up to the peak, via the south face. If conditions allow it, connecting with the summer trail ridge would be the more direct, albeit slightly more exposed, ascent option. Descend Chisenupuri on the south or southwest aspect – the west aspect proper is often wind affected.

At around 890m on the flanks of Chisenupuri, head due northwest across the broad, featureless saddle towards Shakunage-dake. The Shakunage-dake peak is easily gained, and the descent north off the peak towards Shakunage-numa is very short-lived. Continue in a north-then-northwest arc, following a broad ridge-like feature towards Shirakaba-yama. The descent from the 1041m point north of Shakunage-numa is very mellow, but the vast plateau-like descent is fast and inspiring.

Make the long traversing ascent to the diminutive Shirakaba-yama. From here, skiers need to decide if they’ll push on in the alpine, or drop down to Niimi Onsen to camp. The descent to Niimi Onsen wipes off an additional 250m of vertical gain (when compared with just skiing to Niimi Pass), which needs to be made up for the next day. That said, the onsen hot water still flows freely at the onsen ruins (just foundations remain), so intrepid skiers may wish to indulge in the ultimate Hokkaido ski touring experience – wild onsen in the snow with a camp nearby. There’s also a spring in the vicinity of the ruins, at the north end of the large pond-like pool.

Regardless of whether you drop down to Niimi Onsen or not, you’ll cross another road – the snowed-in Route 268. This roughly marks the half-way point in the traverse. The ascent to the Mekunnai-dake summit is one of the more significant ascents in the traverse – it’s long and particularly exposed to the elements. Mekunnai-dake is an impressive volcanic

dome with a very distinctive rocky summit.

From the Mekunnai-dake summit, it’s a hard-packed, rattly descent down to the Panmekunnai Moor, after which the final ascent of the traverse begins – the long, gradual approach to the rather anticlimactic featureless peak of Raiden-yama. If you’ve not experienced any strong wind on the traverse yet, you’ll most likely experience it here. Bitter northwesterlies blow uninhibited from the Japan Sea, slamming into Raiden-yama’s buttressed northwestern side.

The most practical descent to the sea takes the skier along the broad northern ridge from the summit, via Maeraiden-yama, skirting the 997m point, and down to the small hamlet of about five houses at Shikishimanai. This ridge offers some great skiing, with views of the sea the entire way down. At the terminus of the ridge is a steep bluff, but just above the bluff is the ruins of an old house. There’s a decaying access path to the house to the skier’s left of the house, which will lead you to the main highway. Head just 50m southwest along the highway, and you’ll come to the dilapidated Shikishimanai port. Surely it’s time for a celebratory swim!

You can either wait for one of the six buses that stop at the Shikishimanai bus stop, or walk the 5km northeast along the coast road to the Iwanai Bus Terminal 岩内バスターミナル.

TRANSPORT

By car: There is plenty of parking at the large public snow cleared parking area at the Goshiki Gate on Route 58. There’s also plenty of parking at any of the ski areas around the southeast base of Nise-ko Annupuri. At the end of the route on the Raiden coast, there’s a small cleared parking area just before the entrance to the Narukami Tunnel 鳴神トンネル on Route 229 along the coast, just above the Shikishimanai Port.

Public transport: The Niseko resort area is well serviced by public bus and rail from Sapporo City. See access details on the Niseko United website. Access to Goshiki Onsen in the winter is by private car or taxi only. Expect to pay around 7,000yen for a

taxi from central Hirafu to Goshiki Onsen. From the Raiden coast, there is a public bus service running buses six times daily to and from the Iwanai Bus Terminal. From Iwanai Bus Terminal, there is a direct bus back to the Niseko resort area via Kutchan Town. If you have to escape from the route part way through, your most practical option would be to call a taxi.

SAFETY NOTES

This route is heavily exposed to changing weather conditions. But, it also offers numerous ‘exit’ options to ski down to one of the snow-cleared road ends. Be sure to take a map so that you know where these escape routes are. Avalanche hazard is very manageable with good terrain selection options throughout the trip.

ONSEN NEARBY

Given this is a point-to-point tour you’ll have options at both the start and end of the trip. Goshiki Onsen 五色温泉 (800yen) is a must-visit at the eastern end of the range, as are any of the Niseko resort area onsen – our pick of the bunch is Ikoinoyuyado Iroha いこいの湯宿 いろは (800yen), hear the base of Annupuri ski area. In Iwanai there are two great onsen up the hill by the Iwanai ski area: San san no yu サンサンの湯 (500yen) and Okaerinasai onsen おかえりなさい (800yen). Of course, during the traverse, there’s the ‘backcountry onsen’ experience at Nimii onsen. ■

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: <https://hokw.jp/nisekohr>

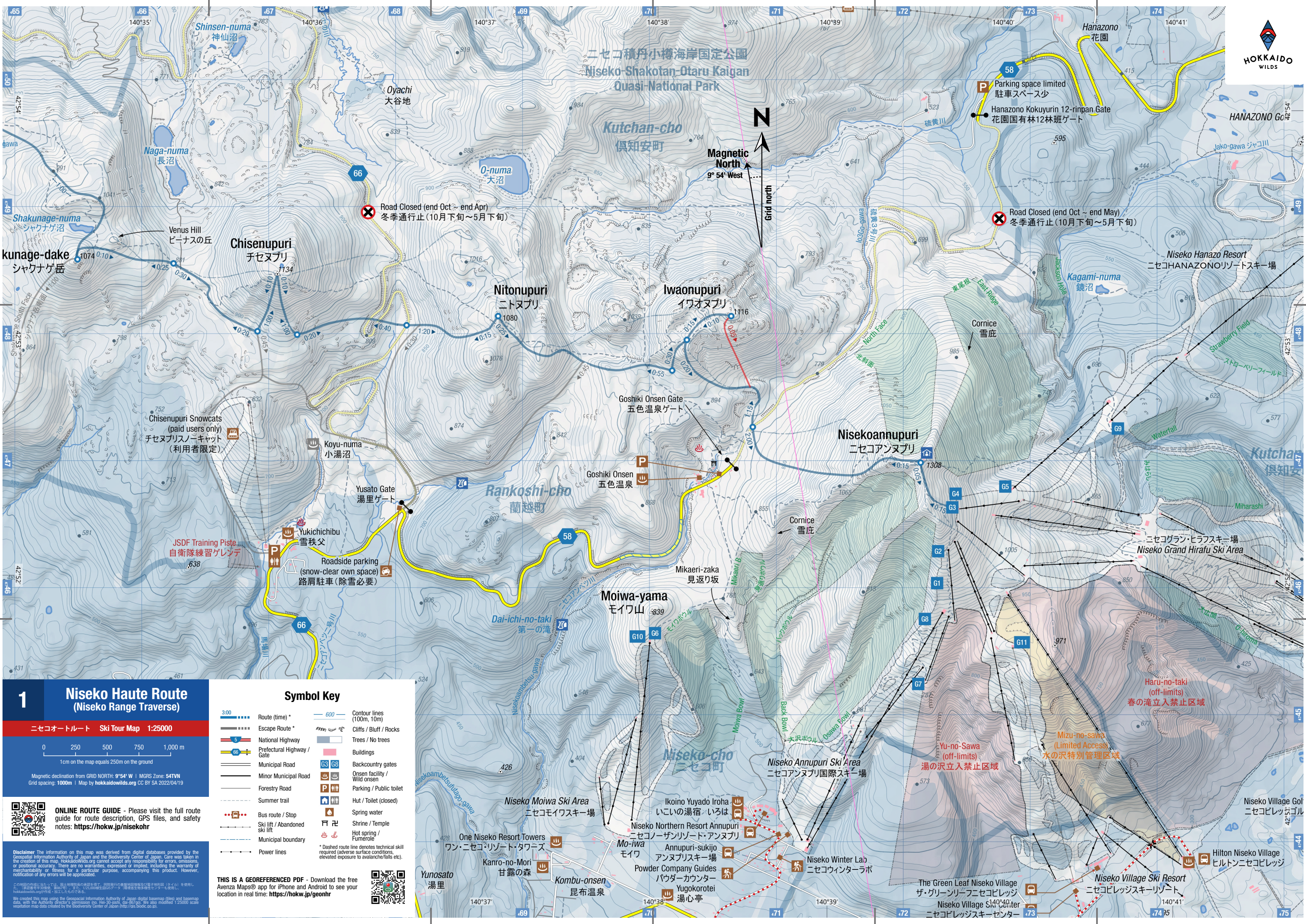
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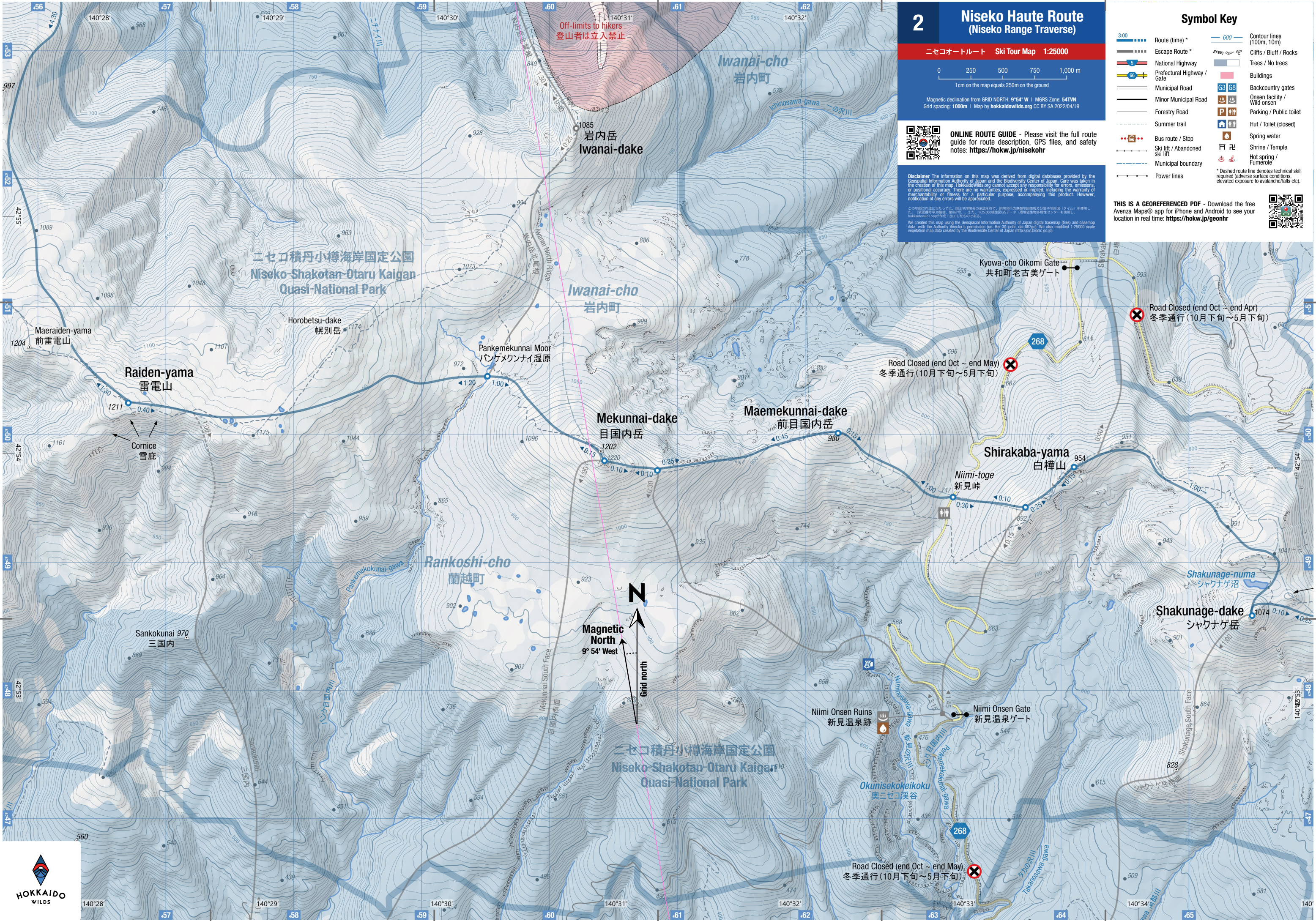
TEXT | Rob Thomson, Chris Auld
PHOTOS, MAP | Rob Thomson

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MAP FOLD & LAYOUT CONCEPT | @welldonegan

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2 Niseko Haute Route (Niseko Range Traverse)

ニセコオートルート Ski Tour Map 1:25000



Magnetic declination from GRID NORTH: 9°54' W | MGRS Zone: 54TVN
Grid spacing: 1000m | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2022/04/19



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

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Symbol Key

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| 3:00 | Route (time) * | 600 | Contour lines (100m, 10m) |
| ---- | Escape Route * | 崖 | Cliffs / Bluff / Rocks |
| 5 | National Highway | 樹 | Trees / No trees |
| 66 | Prefectural Highway / Gate | 建物 | Buildings |
| ---- | Municipal Road | G3 G8 | Backcountry gates |
| ---- | Minor Municipal Road | 温泉 | Onsen facility / Wild onsen |
| ---- | Forestry Road | P | Parking / Public toilet |
| ---- | Summer trail | トイレ | Hut / Toilet (closed) |
| ... | Bus route / Stop | 温泉 | Spring water |
| ---- | Ski lift / Abandoned ski lift | 神社 | Shrine / Temple |
| ---- | Municipal boundary | 温泉 | Hot spring / Fumerole |
| ---- | Power lines | | |
- * Dashed route line denotes technical skill required (adverse surface conditions, elevated exposure to avalanche/falls etc).

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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.

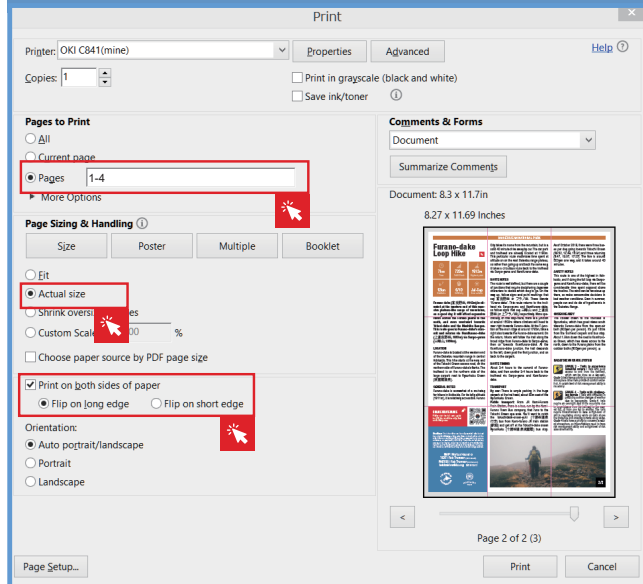


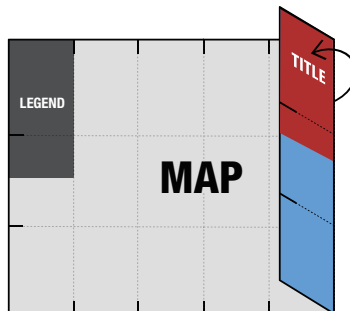
Figure 1. Ensure "Actual Size" is selected (Windows).

ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS

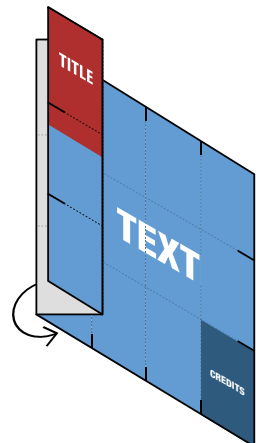
1



2



3



4



5



6



7

