




Iwabe Coast

岩部海岸Sea Kayaking Map1:25000







4hrs
Time




12km
Distance




7.5/10
Difficulty



5/5
Remoteness



4/5
Water clarity



May-Oct
Best season

The Iwabe Coast 岩部海岸 on the Tsugaru Strait 津軽海峡 shoreline in southern Hokkaido is a surprisingly well-kept secret as far as sea kayaking goes. This short 10km stretch of uninhabited and remote coastline boasts some of Hokkaido’s most spectacular coastal scenery and inlets, rivaled only by the Shiretoko Peninsula in far eastern Hokkaido. Expect numerous waterfalls, deep caves, rock arches, beautifully remote inlets, and a refreshing lack of flotsam on the beaches. It’s a remote coast suitable for experienced outdoors-people, but access is easy and there are wild camping options along the way.

LOCATION
The Iwabe Coast is an inaccessible-by-land snippet of coast sandwiched between Fukushima Town 福島町 and Shiriuchi Town 知内町 in far southern Hokkaido, southwest of Hakodate City 函館市. The western end of the route is close to where the Hokkaido Shinkansen bullet train tunnel exits the sea. The body of water here is the mighty Tsugaru Strait 津軽海峡, separating Hokkaido from Honshu, Japan’s largest mainland island.

Put-in location: This route can be paddled in either direction. Here we describe starting from the very convenient Ikarikai Parking Area, replete with public toilets, a water spiggot, and a somewhat curious gravel area where people can

(and do) camp. There are concrete steps down to the coast, and there are a couple of options for putting-in, in the shelter of the large rocks. If you’re on your own and would prefer not to carry your kayak down to the water, there’s also the option of putting in just east of Shiriuchi Kotaniishi fishing port. There’s a concrete ramp down to a small protected beach.

Take-out location: At the western end of the route is Iwabe Port. Officially this is a fishing port. Therefore, as per Hokkaido bylaws, it’s technically not allowed for recreational watercraft to land in the port. However, the port is rarely used for fishing these days. There’s a small sandy beach at the far western corner of the port that is most suitable for kayaks to put in, in order to keep out of the way. The port is also used by the friendly folk at Iwabe Cruise, a family-run business taking tourists on boat cruises along the coast – on a busy day they’ll do two or three cruises. Kayakers should be mindful to keep out of the way of cruise boats.

GENERAL NOTES
It’s hard to overstate just how diverse and engaging this section of coast is. Within Hokkaido, we consider it second only to Shiretoko Peninsula as far as feelings of remoteness and wild nature are concerned. In fact, compared to Shiretoko, there’s much less boat traffic on the Iwabe Coast. There’s even a remarkable lack of small fishing vessels. Along the way are secluded inlets, inset and bounded by high cliffs. The forest hugging the cliffs is untouched and wild. On a clear day, you’ll be able to see the northern tip of Honshu in the distance across the Tsugaru-kaikyo Strait.

In places, there are flat, rocky reefs that would be perfect for snorkeling. We’d also recommend carrying a head torch and having it handy – there are a couple of impossibly long sea caves that are great fun to explore.

Difficulty: On a calm day with a clear forecast, even beginners will enjoy this coast. However, conditions can change fast on this exposed coast – wind and currents can combine to create very complex sea conditions. Escape options are non-existent also. Overall, this coast is best suited for upper-intermediate paddlers with plenty of experience.

Paddling direction: Below we describe paddling from east to west, but either direction is fine – paddlers can adjust based on the wind direction. The relatively short total distance also lends well to an out-and-back loop trip rather than a one-way trip requiring the long 40-minute shuttle.

ROUTE TIMING AND NOTES

While it’s perfectly possible to smash this route out in less than three hours, we’d recommend making a day of it. The inlets are nice spots for a secluded break, and there are a number of caves to explore along the way.

Starting from the Ikarikai Parking area, navigate the rocky outcrops at the put-in and start paddling southwest along the coast. The first 3km from the put-in to Yagoshi-misaki cape includes some shallow rocky reefs that are fun to weave in and out of if the conditions allow it. They’re also great for snorkelling.

Yagoshi-misaki cape 矢越岬 is where the coast bends to the west, so can be the border between favourable and challenging sea states. It’s best to hold objectives lightly therefore, and be open to turning back at the cape if conditions on the other side of the cape are unfavorable.

Paddlers will notice concrete pier-like structures on the east and west sides of Yagoshi-misaki cape. It’s possible to land at these and climb stairs to a shrine (on the west side of the cape) and a small lighthouse structure. Depending on the season, the stairs and ladders may be overgrown with poison-ivy though, so take care – two in our group suffered for weeks after our visit with rashes after making the trek to the 121m point on the eastern side of the cape.

Arguably it’s the section of coast on the western side of Yagoshi-misaki that has the most remote and engaging feeling. There are numerous sea caves, arches, and inlets to explore. The first option for landing along this stretch – the Tsuzura-sawa River inlet ツヅル沢入江 – is about 2km west of Yagoshi-misaki. This is a phenomenally remote-feeling valley with a wild river, easy-landing beach, and rock arch. It would make for a suitable place to camp if you’re OK with a relative lack of flat ground to sleep.

SOUTHERN HOKKAIDO

About 600m along the coast is the Blue Cave (青の洞窟, *ao-no-dokutsu*). This is a truly colossal cave with high ceilings, two entrances, and undercut walls that allow light to glow under the water, painting the water an azure blue. Tourist cruises (up to four times per day) also enter the cave, so take care if you’re there between the hours of 9am and 4pm.

Another 1km west of the Blue Cave is Funakakushi Inlet 船隠入江, which literally means ‘ship-hiding cove’. When you see it, you’ll understand. The cove is partially hidden behind a small but very tall island – Funakakushi Island 船隠島 (lit. *ship-hiding island*). This cove has more flat area for pitching a tent, and also has a stream with fresh water.

From Funakakushi Inlet it’s another 4km or so to the take out at the largely disused Iwabe fishing port 岩部漁港. On this last stretch, you’ll paddle along the Iwabe Cliffs 岩部断崖, and there’s a nice waterfall at the coast at Tatami-gawa river タタミ川. Tsubakura-misaki cape ツバクラ岬 can have some current effects due to Tsugaru Strait eddies, so paddlers should be ready for a brief period of messy chop in the immediate area.

As mentioned above, the Iwabe fishing port is only used by a handful of small fishing vessels these days, but it is used almost daily (up to four times a day) by Iwabe Cruises – they run tourist sightseeing cruises in a small boat along the coast to just before Yagashi-misaki. Kayakers should strive to hug the inside of the breakwater on the western side of the port, in order to avoid getting in the way of boats in the port. Technically, as per Hokkaido bylaws prohibiting recreational craft using fishing ports, kayakers are not allowed to use the port unless in an emergency. Enforcement of the bylaw in Hokkaido is generally quite lax outside of the Otaru/Shakotan area, but as a kayaker, it’s best to keep aware of and sensitive to the wishes of other legitimate port users.

TRANSPORT
By car I There is plenty of parking at both ends of the route – Ikarikai Parking area イカリカイ駐車帯 in the east, and a large gravel area at Iwabe fishing port 岩部漁港 in the west. Note that the shuttle between both ends of the route is quite long – just over 40km (about 45mins by car).

Public transport I The eastern end of the route at Ikarikai is accessible by a public bus run by Hakodate Bus 函館バス. They run the No. 410/411 (410/411系統) bus from the Hakodate Bus Center 函館バスセンター in Hakodate City to Taki-no-ma bus stop 滝の間バス停, right outside a concrete ramp down to a small protected beach, just west of Ikarikai Parking area. Google Maps has good timetabling information, here. For those traveling to the area by train, it might be more convenient to catch the bus from Kikonai Station 木古内駅 instead. Iwabe fishing port at the western end of the route is *not* accessible by public transport. Central Fukushima village is about 8km west along the coast from the port. There is one taxi company in Fukushima Village – Yamazaki Hire 山崎ハイヤー (TEL: 0139-47-2014).

SAFETY NOTES
Given the remoteness, lack of boat traffic, and lack of escape options, this section of coast is best suited to paddlers with good outdoor skills and experience. Much of the coast is made up of rocky cliffs diving straight into the sea, and even where landing is possible, escape on foot is impossible. Also note that the Iwabe Coast is known for messy, difficult waves when wind and currents collide. On a calm day with a clear forecast, even beginners will enjoy this stretch of coast, but consequences are very


high for the unprepared if anything does go wrong. Overall, we’d recommend this stretch of coast for upper-intermediate paddlers who have the knowledge and experience to handle a variety of sea states and conditions.

ONSEN NEARBY
Komorebi Onsen こもれび温泉 (350yen) is the closest onsen to the eastern end of the route, about 6.5km north of Ikarikai Parking area. This is a public facility, supporting the employment of town residents who need social support. It has a number of indoor baths, a cold plunge pool, a sauna, and a small outdoor bath. There’s also a basic attached restaurant selling curry rice and other basic meals – the restaurant is open from 11am to 2:30pm and 5pm to 8pm. For a more rustic ‘authentic’ onsen experience, consider a soak at the historic Shiriuchi Onsen 知内温泉 (800yen). Their baths are caked in mineral deposits, and there are indoor and outdoor pools. Unless you are staying the night there, they don’t offer meals. ■

Japanese Map Glossary		
Romaji	Kanji	English
cho	町	town
dake/mine	岳/峯	peak
eki	駅	station
goya/koya	小屋	hut
gyoko	漁港	fishing port
ike	池	pond
iwa	岩	rock
kaigan	海岸	coast
kawa/gawa	川	river
ko/mizumi	湖	lake
ko	港	port
misaki	岬	cape
onsen	温泉	hot spring
sawa	沢	stream
shima	島	island
tani/dani	谷	valley
taki	滝	waterfall
today	灯台	lighthouse
toge	峠	pass
wan	湾	bay
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/iwabe>



Disclaimer


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MAP, TEXT, PHOTOS | Rob Thomson


hokkaidowilds.org 2023/08/01


MAP FOLD & LAYOUT CONCEPT | Dominika Gan

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HOKKAIDO WILDS

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Palm

Aqua Bound

Iwabe Coast

岩部海岸Sea Kayaking Map Map1:25000

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1cm on the map equals 250m on the ground

Mag. declination from GRID NORTH: 9°35' W (-3' per year) | MGRS Zone: 54TVL

Grid spacing: 1000m | Map by hokkaidowilds.org CC BY SA 2023/08/01

Symbol Key

2.5km

Suggested route (distance)

5m

Depth (approx.)

Intertidal zones

Fixed nets (month/type*)

Cliffs / Bluff / Rocks

Cave / Bears common

Fishing port / Marina

Prone to rough seas / Tidal currents

Submarine cable

5

National Highway

66

Prefectural Highway

Municipal Road

Minor Road / Track

600

Land contour lines (100m, 10m)

Trees / No trees

P

Buildings

P

Parking / Onsen

Shop / Avoid landing

Camp-suitable / Water source

Escape-suitable / Fishing hut (banya)

Shrine / Temple

Hot spring / Fumerole

Transmission tower

Bus route / Stop

Municipal boundary

S=sake (salmon), M=maguro (tuna), H=hokke (mackerel), Iw=iwashi (sardine), Ik=ika (squid), Ms=masu (Cherry/pink salmon), S=buri (yellowtail), K=karei (flounder)

Online Routes and Downloads

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

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We created this map using the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan digital basemap (tiles) and basemap data, with the Authority director's permission (no. Hei-30-joshi, dai-867/g). We also modified Japan Hydrological Association marine data (newpec raster data and M7000 underwater contour data, Permission No. 2022005) and 1:25,000 scale vegetation map data created by the Biodiversity Center of Japan (<http://gis.biodic.go.jp>).

HOKKAIDO WILDS

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.



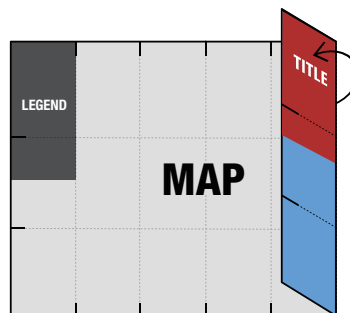
Figure 1. Ensure "Actual Size" is selected (Windows).

ORIGAMI INSTRUCTIONS

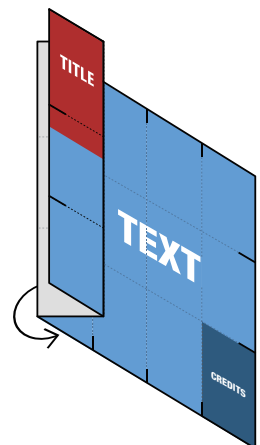
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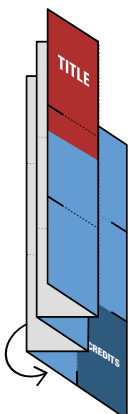
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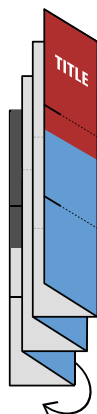
3



4



5



6



7

