

# Homan San and the Cave

*A Jodo pilgrimage*



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# Homan San and the cave

## *Going to Kamado Jinja*

The walk starts at the lower Kamado shrine<sup>1</sup>. The shrine itself is worth a visit, even if you don't want to make the hike. It contains a side shrine dedicated to Muso Gonnosuke<sup>2</sup>.



Kamado Jinja is located in the city of Dazaifu, Fukuoka Prefecture. The city's train station is operated by the private Nishitetsu Group<sup>4</sup>. Therefore the best train connection is from Fukuoka's Nishitetsu Tenjin Station, which can be reached from JR Hakata Station with the Kuko metro line.

From Tenjin Station you have to take the Tenjin-Omuta Line to Futsukaichi and change there to the Dazaifu line for 2 stops. Dazaifu is the last station on this line. There are a limited number of direct connections<sup>5</sup>.

A typical trip from Hakata takes about 45min, with 3 minutes to make the change in Futsukaichi Station. This might seem like too short a time to change, but in Japan it is not. The cost one-way is currently ¥560.

Alternative connections<sup>5,6</sup> are available, using the JR Kagoshima Line and / or buses. If you don't want to search the Nishitetsu website, google maps usually provides accurate information.



Having arrived at Dazifu station, you can leave your luggage in a coin locker. Coming out of the station, take a sharp turn left and find the bus station on the other side of the road.



The local bus departs every half hour and takes ten minutes with the last station being Kamado Shrine<sup>7</sup>. Currently it leaves at 2 (or 3) minutes and at 32 minutes after the hour.





The main Kamado shrine is dedicated to deities of marriage and protection and gives a lovely view over its surroundings.



From the carpark the first stairs will take you up to the main hall, passing side shrines, caged deer, a pond and the shop for Omamori. These are just the first stone steps of many, many more to come.





At the top of the stairs, on the left side of the main hall you will find the Gonnosuke shrine.



After having paid your respects, you are ready to take the hike. Following the path to the left, passing a second pond you come to a street and a board with Japanese and English information about the hike.





## *To the Top of Homan San*

The board shows that it's only 2.8km to the top of the mountain. However many parts of the hike are quite steep and in total you have to go from about 180m to 829m above sea-level.

The main path starts following a paved road but there are alternative paths. I chose the path leading through the woods and over a small ridge.



I soon re-joined the main way, which quickly lead to the steps up the mountain. It was a lovely Saturday in February, maybe the first warm day on a weekend. A lot of Japanese hikers were on the road, ranging from families with young children, groups of student to retirees.







Kamado Shrine is actually 3 shrines. Aside from the main location on the foot of the mountain, there is a middle station and a shrine at the top. Only ruins are left of the middle station.





More stairs follow and from time to time you reach places that open to views over the valley and city.



Including a short rest and picture taking, I arrived at the top in one hour and forty minutes. Inexperienced hikers should calculate with two hours. During the last part of my ascent, I already encountered the first people coming down. It was crowded on top so there was no chance to get a good picture of the shrine without people in it.





When you come around the corner, you first see the side of the shrine and then encounter the mountain itself. A metal plaque in the ground gives information in Japanese about the surrounding peaks.



Even though there is a good view over the valley with the city of Dazaifu, turning around you can see that Homan San is just the first step on a multi mountain trail, with Butcho San just about 15 minutes away.





## *The Cave*

You have to leave the top on the other side by climbing down a rock face of about eight meter high, assisted by a chain or ropes. According to the maps, there are alternative trails around the top that you can reach by going back the last part of the stairs, but I didn't look for them.



Only a few steps away from the climb is a camping ground that you have to cross. On the far side to the right you pass some toilets.





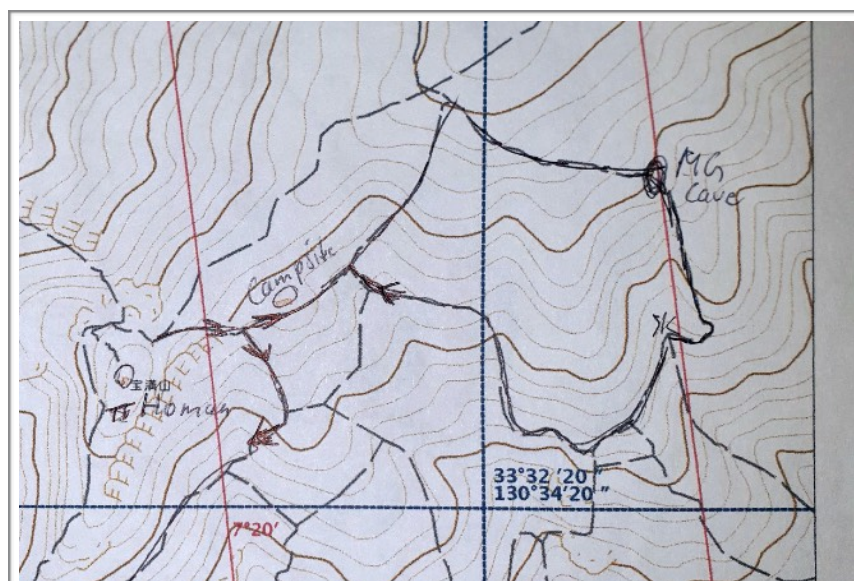
So far it has been easy to follow the path. Stone stairs, wooden ladders and wide trails, as well as many other hikers made it hard to miss the correct turns.

The cave is not a popular hiking spot. Most groups went down the way they came or continued on to the next peak. From here until I was back to the ruins of the middle shrine, I didn't encounter anyone else.

This is the time where a good map and especially a smartphone or other GPS device is needed. The way to the cave is short - about 15 to 20 minutes - but there are a lot of trails branching off left and right. If you don't know exactly where you have to go, it's easy to lose hours searching for the spot. There are a few signs and some trails are marked with ribbons. I don't recommend relying only on those markers.



Leaving the campsite behind, you first have to continue the trail to the next peak, then take a turn to the right.







Following these small wooden trails, you finally descend onto the big rock of the cave. It's actually just a huge boulder lying on the side of the mountain.

Underneath you find the spot where Shinto Muso Ryu is said to have been conceived.







On maps the cave is marked as 普池の窟 - Fuike Cave.

The entrance is low, but once through there is enough space in the back to stand and it is big enough for a small group of people to be inside together.

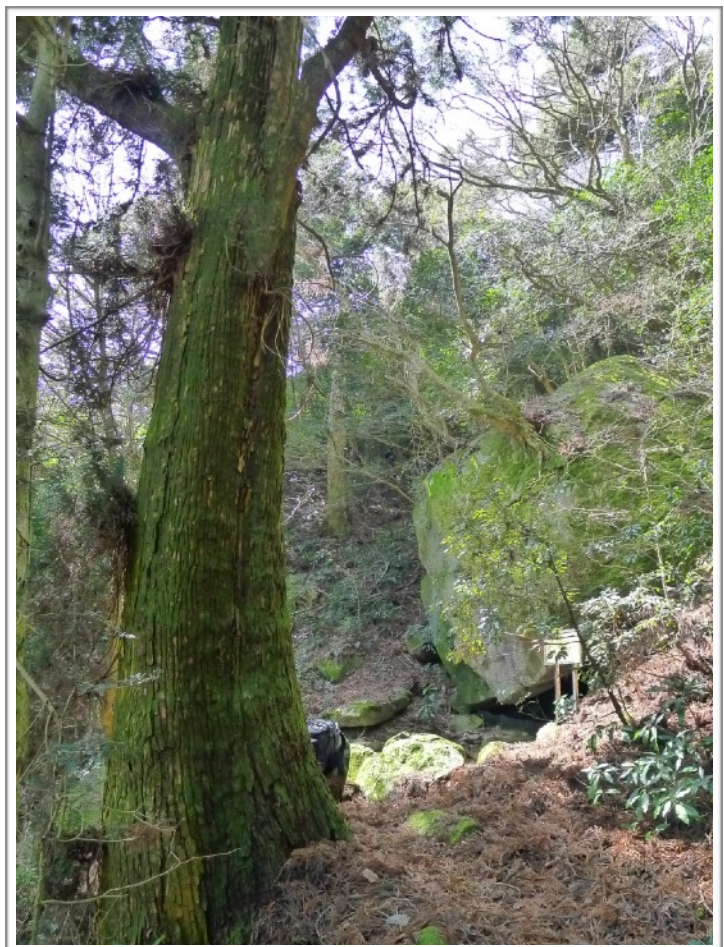
A lot of gifts have been brought to the cave, including some now half-rotten jo, sake and some statues.







In front of the cave you find a tall conifer.  
Is it old enough to have been gazed upon by Gonnosuke?





You can now take the same way back or complete the circle to the campground. I continued on, passing by another cave with a spring. (Gold Water Cave)  
Even though it is longer and includes more turns, this might actually be the easier way to find. The trails are wider, seem more used and are better marked.



Here I also came across the only sign mentioning our cave.





## *The Way Back*

Whenever possible, I try not to follow the same hiking trail twice. Therefore I also took alternative paths from the campsite to the ruins and then from ruins to the lower Kamado Jinja.

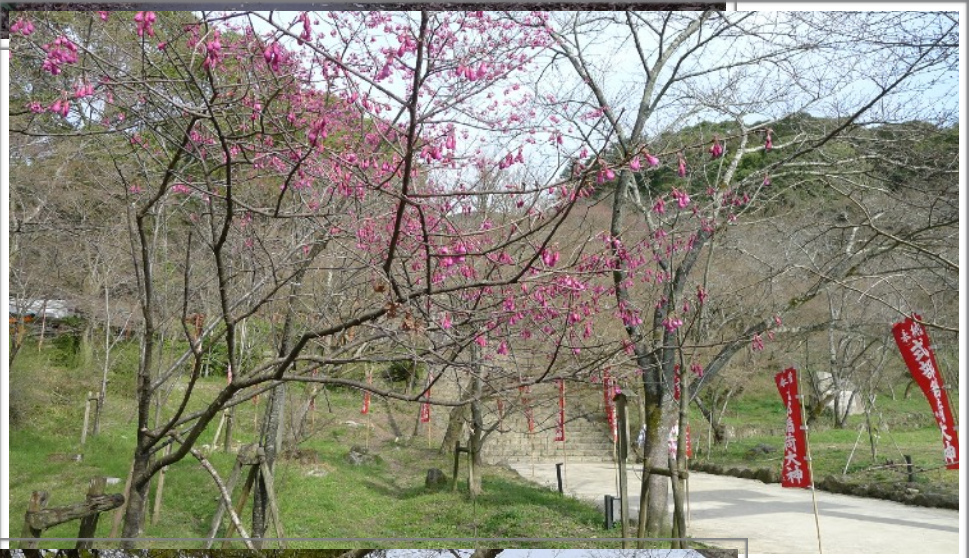
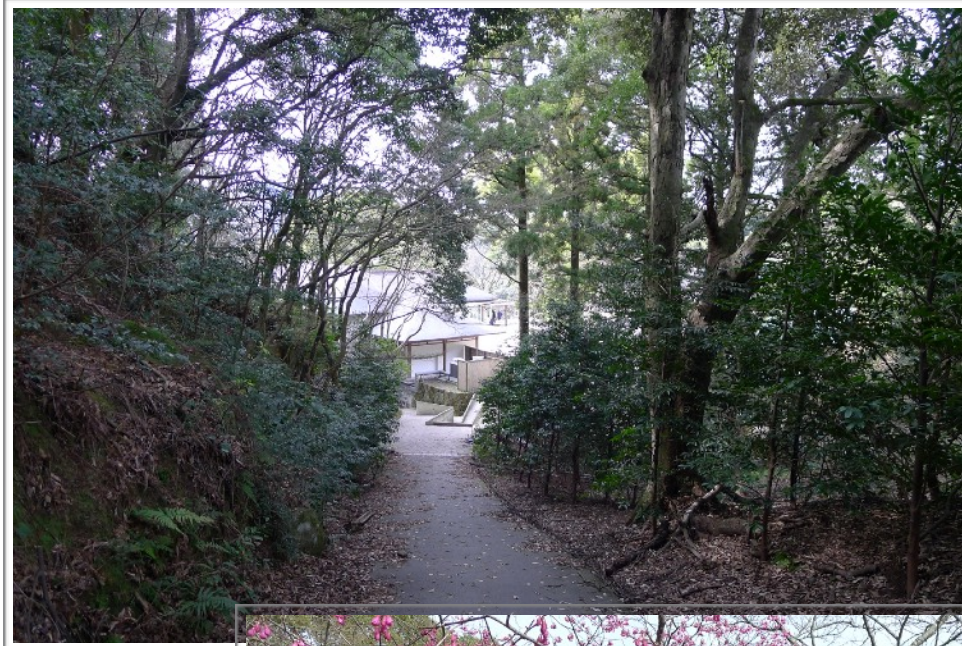
I enjoyed this less trodden path a lot. There were not so many people and the path was a natural wood trail.

During my way down from the ruins, I came across a small abandoned shrine in the middle of the woods, which might have been Aitake Shrine.





Taking this south-eastern path, you arrive on the opposite side of the main shrine from that you left. The whole trip, including a long lunch break at the cave took about six hours.







A last visit to Gonnosuke's Shrine and then back to the city with the local bus.





## *While you're in Dazaifu*

The two main attractions are the Tenmangu Shrine and the modern Kyushu National Museum. Both are worth a visit, as well as a walk around the centre, including the touristic Tenjinsama Dori.





## *Continuing the Pilgrimage in Fukuoka*

While you are in the area, make sure not to miss the Fukuoka castle ruins and museum.



You might even want to visit the relocated castle gate at Sofukuji<sup>8</sup>, where you can also have a look at the Kaminoda family graves. (That part of the cemetery is only open on weekends.)





## *Tips before you do the hike*

To avoid going in circles in search of the cave, you should prepare by making yourself familiar with the area you are going to hike and get the tools you are most comfortable with.

My setup was as follows:

- Geographica App<sup>9</sup>
- Added Japanese Maps (GSI)<sup>10,11</sup> - preloaded, but I had good mobile reception all day.
- Printed Map, including two of lower quality that have hiking paths drawn<sup>11,12</sup>

While researching the trip I came across yamap.com. This is a website where Japanese people share their hiking trips, including GPS information and pictures.

This information was very helpful to confirm the location of the cave on the map.

Please refer to the resources below, for links to the trips that I found most useful<sup>13ff</sup>.

If you want to search further, you can simply use a general search engine and look for “yamap 宝満山” or “yamap 普池の窟” or use yamap’s search<sup>16</sup>.

Additionally, I contacted the Japanese Alpine Club for information about buying a map. They sent me the following picture instead:





## Online Resources

- (1) Kamado Jinja Website: <http://kamadojinja.or.jp/>
- (2) Kamado Jinja Gonnosuke Shrine: [https://kamadojinja.or.jp/keidai/#keidai\\_11](https://kamadojinja.or.jp/keidai/#keidai_11)
- (3) Kamado Jinja Homan San: [https://kamadojinja.or.jp/mt\\_houmanzan/](https://kamadojinja.or.jp/mt_houmanzan/)
- (4) Nishitetsu Train Information: <http://www.nishitetsu.jp/train/rosen/>
- (5) Fukuoka -> Dazaifu <https://www.thetravelmentor.com/2019/04/taking-a-day-trip-to-dazaifu-from-fukuoka-hakata-japan/>
- (6) Fukuoka -> Dazaifu <https://www.touristinjapan.com/how-to-get-to-dazaifu-tenmagu-shrine/>
- (7) Bus timetables (look for 内山 [竈門神社 / Uchiyama)  
<http://www.city.dazaifu.lg.jp/admin/kurashi/doro/1/5896.html>  
eg week: <http://www.city.dazaifu.lg.jp/material/files/group/8/utiyamaikiheijitu.pdf>
- (8) Sofukuji: [http://bunkazai.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/sp/cultural\\_properties/detail/146](http://bunkazai.city.fukuoka.lg.jp/sp/cultural_properties/detail/146)
- (9) Android Geographica: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=jp.keiziweb.geographica&hl=en>
- (10) Map Print & App Setup: <https://hokkaidowilds.org/android-iphone-apps-displaying-japan-topographical-maps-english>
- (11) Homan San on GSI: <https://maps.gsi.go.jp/#15/33.539680/130.569096/&base=std&ls=std&disp=1&vs=c1j0h0k0l0u0t0z0r0s0m0f0>
- (12) Map w/ trails: <https://cdn.yamap.co.jp/public/image2.yamap.co.jp/production/2829864?h=502&t=resize&w=960>
- (13) Hike mentioning Muso Gonnosuke: <https://yamap.com/activities/1807443>
- (14) 7 caves hike: <https://yamap.com/activities/92668>
- (15) Hike with many pics of signposts <https://yamap.com/activities/1038227>
- (16) Yamap search: <https://yamap.com/search/activities?sort=match&keyword=普池の窟>

Other documents that help in preparation:

- (1) Detailed, pictured guide to hiking Homan San (but cave not included): <https://www.fukuoka-now.com/en/hiking-guide-homanzan-sangunsan/>
- (2) Another hike description by fellow jodo partitioners: <http://jodojo.es/viaje-a-kyushu/>
- (3) Reading Japanese Hiking Maps: <https://ridgelineimages.com/maps/japanese-maps-and-map-reading/>

Happy hiking, ヘルガ (2019/20)

Contact me for further information, or copies of my maps: [hewu@gmx.at](mailto:hewu@gmx.at)

German Version: [jodo-iaido.at/HomanSan](https://jodo-iaido.at/HomanSan)