

# Kurume History Walks

## No.7 Exploring the Ancient Roads 古代道路を掘る



In 1992, the investigation started on this site. It is the remains of Saikaido. Here, we researched 70 meters of the road. The ditches (street drains) should have been dug many times, so its shape is unformed. We estimate that it was over 7 meters wide and was used between the 8th and 11th centuries. The soil and gravel that were used to pave a road remained.

### Image of the Ancient road

What roads come up to your mind when you hear “the Ancient Roads”? Winding, narrow, complex, or rough roads?

Then, let’s trace back to the past of Japan. After World War II (1939-1945), the road system was in very poor condition compared to other countries. In the Edo period (1603-1868), the Five Highways were built to connect the capital (Edo, today’s Tokyo) to the outer provinces. These were about 3.6 meters wide but with twists and turns.

So, even the historians had considered that the Ancient Roads should have been curving trails of one or two meters wide at most. However, the recent investigations discovered these traces one after another, and the results largely changed the image so far.

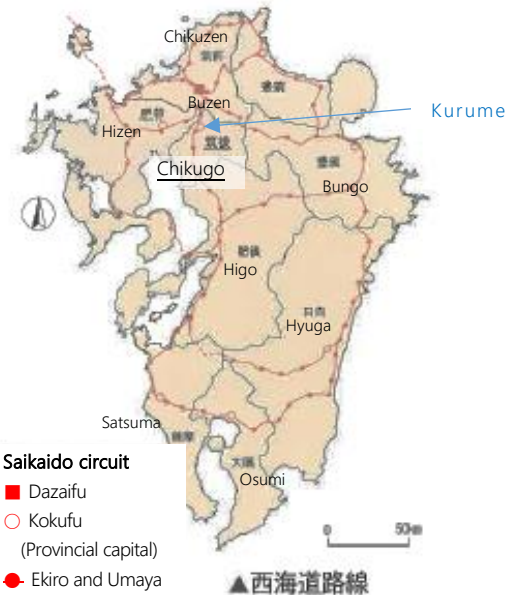
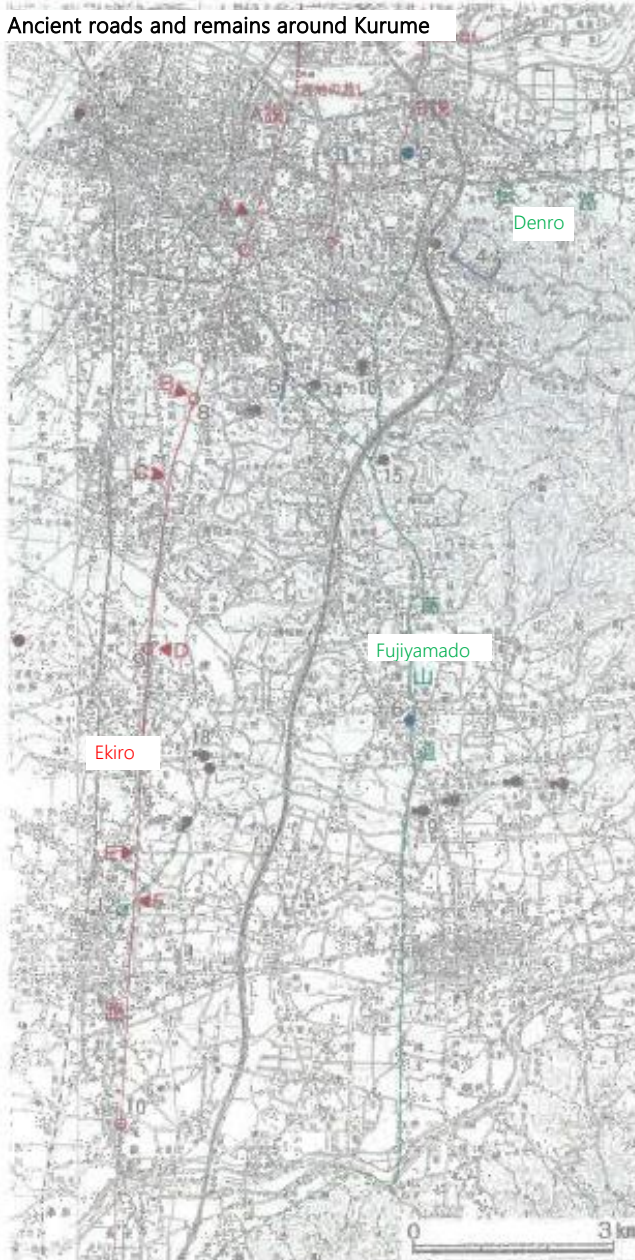
## Construction of roads

The Ancient Roads can be divided into the “natural” and the “planned” road. The former was formed naturally by everyday use. The latter was constructed from the eighth century by the centralized government for connecting the capital (today’s Nara and then Kyoto) or Dazaifu to the provinces.

In Japan (except Hokkaido), there used to be the seven circuits called *ekiro* 駅路: *Tokaido*, *Tosando*, *Hokurikudo*, *San'indo*, *San'yodo*, *Nankaido*, and *Saikaido*. The law required that every 16 kilometers of the *ekiro* circuit, the facilities (*umaya* 駅家) should be established for the official travelers, and should station the horses (*yakume* 駅馬) for the emergency contact. The use was very limited: the delivery of official documents, the official travel for specific missions, etc.

All districts were also ordered to set up the post-horses (*denba* 伝馬) on the roads (*denro* 伝路) between each district. We presume that existing natural roads were improved for building *denro*, which was also limited to the official purpose: the transfer of the provincial governor, the official travel, or the escort of the important criminals.

Ancient roads and remains around Kurume



**Saikaido circuit**  
 ■ Dazaifu  
 ○ Kokufu  
 (Provincial capital)  
 ▲ Ekiri and Umayu

- 1 Remains of Chikugo Kokufu (provincial capital)
- 2 Remains of Chikugo-Kokubun-ji (provincial temple)
- 3 Hebonoki remains
- 4 *Kogoishi*: Stones arranged maybe in 7th century.
- 5 Remains of clay walls
- 6 Remains of Kozuma district office (presumed)
- 7 First investigation site of Seikado
- 8 Kurumadi remains
- 9 Second investigation site
- 10 Tsurudanaka-Ichinozuka remains
- 11 Uenohara remains
- 12 Hainuzuka-Ibanomoto remains
- 13 Nichirin-ji Burial Mound
- 14 Urayama Burial Mound
- 15 Kabutozuka Burial Mound
- 16 Ishibitsuyama Burial Mound
- 17 Gionyama Burial Mound
- 18 Sekijinsan Burial Mound
- 19 Iwatoyama Burial Mound

The place-names of A-F on the map contain the words: 車 (vehicle), 路 (road), 地 (place).

## Remains of roads

**Ekiro** (Road between the capital and the provinces)

In the 1970s, a new search method of tracing the Ancient Roads by the aerial photographic and the large-scale maps became widely popular. Speaking of our province, we came to think of the existence of the *ekiro* through the above method and the following facts:

- Borders of the administrative units are almost in line.
- Long and narrow lands over 10 meters in width were low.
- The name of some places in the city is with the words of “vehicle, *kuruma*(車)” and “road, *ji*(路)” or “place, *di*(地)”.

From 1992, the successive excavations on the estimated *ekiro* area discovered the remains of the road 7-9 meters wide with the street drains on both sides. Then, we have found remains in 1993 at Kurumadi (車地), Fujimitsu. It proved our estimation based on the place-name.

From the results, the *ekiro* seems to be constructed by the early Nara period at the latest. In the beginning, it had been well maintained. But decades later, it was scaled down and was no longer used in the 12th century.

**Denro** (Road between the districts)

The Hebonoki remains (3 on the map of the previous page) were reportedly an administrative office or a temple. These faced the T-junction of the *denro* and a major road that passes through Chikugo provincial capital (*kokufu*). The construction period is not clear but we suppose it to be abandoned in the 12th century.

### Major road within the provincial capital

Its western side was paved 5-6 meters in breadth with flat stones of the river. After the relocation of the office in the 10th century, it became no more in use.

On the other hand, the eastern side, over 5.5 meters in breadth, continued to be used even after the relocation. With the sandy soil and the clay, the road was built by strongly beating and pressing. That was not equipped with the street drain. Although, that seems very absorbent. During the excavation, when it rained heavily, we were so amazed that the water did not stay on the surface but quickly permeated the soil. At the fourth relocation of the office in the late 11th century, the road was abolished.



Kurumadi Remains



Many earthenwares were discarded in the street drain. These are mainly from the 9th century.



*Denro* road next to Hebonoki remains: paved with stones, narrow and winding.



Intersection at the remains of the *Kokufu*

### **Other roads**

An excavated road of 2.5 meters wide is considered as an approach from the official house of the Chikugo provincial governor to the shrine near the Asazuma no Shimizu Spring.

Besides, a part of a drain ditch running along a road from the Kokufu to Chikugo-Kokubun-ji temple was discovered.

### **In conclusion**

We still have many things to explore. For example, there are two different theories about the position of the ekiro (A and B on the map). Or three umayas of Chikugo province, which was mentioned in "Engishiki (a

book about law and customs; mainly completed in 927)" are not yet identified or discovered. These should be our enormous challenges.



The remains of the *Kokufu*  
The Ancient Road passes beneath the present road. By the Cut Slope method, the surface is a little depressed.

### **Characteristic of the Ancient Road remains**

**Street drains:** Road drain ditches, which are equipped on one or both sides of a road for improving its drainage.

**Culvert:** Drain ditches which were dug to various directions on the road surface and refilled with the sand.

**Corrugated indentation:** Undulating surface imprint that appeared vertically to the direction of an ancient road. It is said to be a trace of pressing by logs for building and maintaining a road or that of a heavy load transportation.

**Pits:** Small holes, which were seen many along a road. It has not been veiled yet how these were used.

**Hardened surface:** Some parts of a road were hardened by pavement construction, or by use for a long time.

**Graveled:** A type of the pavement construction. Gravel and rubble were mainly used, and sometimes crushed earthenware was mixed.

**Banking:** A construction method to build a road at a valley or a meadow, making a bank by tamping earth.

**Through cut:** A road building method at a hill by cutting through the terrain.

**Cut Slope:** A road building method at a low hill by shallowly cutting a slope.

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Date of revision: March 31st, 2010 / Translated in June 2020