

eocheon-Ulli Section

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1. About Eocheon-Ulli Section

If you look at a map, this section is located just slightly east of the center of Jirisan Mountain and mostly comprises mountain paths. Because there are few villages along the path and the scenery is mostly forest, this section is challenging and a little tedious.

As this part of the trail passes over a large peak known as Ungseokbong, it will require a fair degree of physical exertion. Are you well prepared?

2. The House of Cranes

Just as you find yourself becoming a little tired of walking up this inclined asphalt path, you will come to an old Korean traditional house located just off the trail. Known as the 'House of Cranes', it is the residence of a family with a long tradition in this region. They say that this house's name was inspired by the face of the mountain here which resembles a crane in flight. It is the home of a family so large that when they attend their annual family reunions to eat and talk together, they number approximately 50 people.

It was only a few decades ago that the people here lived a life so far removed from civilization, and they had to paddle to get across the river. Nowadays, well-designed roads and houses have been built and it is hard to imagine what this area used to look like. This change began when a bridge was built over the river, allowing traffic to cross. With the improvement of access, socialization increased and the area became more civilized. However, the new development meant that many of the people who lived here began to leave for the city one by one. As the villagers left, villas and other accommodation facilities built by city-dwellers began to appear and gradually this place became completely unrecognizable.

3. Fishing Village

The name of this village literally means the 'Fishing Village', and its residents once lived almost entirely on the variety of fish that could be caught here in the river. Fish caught here, such as crayfish and marsh snails, tend to live only in clean, clear water, so it is apparent that the water quality here is high. Also, because water flows down from Jirisan Mountain to feed the river here, water levels are always high which is good for agriculture.

While living in a mountain village is never easy, the people of this village are said to have lived by growing crops, catching fish from the river and felling timber to sell in the town. The construction of a dam upriver now provides local residents with electricity and water for agriculture, but as the water levels

of the river have dropped by almost half the fish stocks are no longer plentiful.

4. Stories of the Tigers of Jirisan Mountain

Even less than a century ago, there were many tigers inhabiting parts of the Jirisan Mountain region. Tigers could be found not just at the mountain, but all over the country, even in the area now occupied by modern Seoul. The mountain was especially famous for a great tiger that weighed about 400kg. It was so famous for its size that the hunter who eventually caught it appeared in the newspaper.

However, during the Japanese Colonial Period, the Japanese authorities mobilized the military to hunt tigers and drove them to extinction. The reason for indiscriminately hunting the tigers, which were a symbol of the Korean people, was to subdue the Korean spirit. Today they say the decimated population of these tigers is less than 100, which sadly only makes up around 1/70 of the global tiger population. It is also said that at that time many bears, wolves and leopards were subject to culling so harsh that now such beasts have almost disappeared from the Korean Peninsula.

5. Magnificent View of Jirisan Mountain

As you make your way carefully up the slippery path, you will have a wide, magnificent view from the top of the mountain. The flowing river and the expressway built alongside it make a surprisingly harmonious vista. You will be able to see a range of peaks at the foothills of Jirisan Mountain. A local legend says that a bear that was playing here on the summit fell from the cliff to its death.

While today the trees here are dense and we can enjoy this wonderful view, only around 50 to 60 years ago it was a bare mountain. Because of the damage rendered by the Korean War and the thoughtless felling of trees during reconstruction work that followed it, the mountain was a veritable wasteland with barely a plant to be found. Thanks to the tireless work of local residents and many civil groups, the grasses and trees grew back and this place bursts with life once again.

If you have time, take a look at the view from the summit. The view from the 1000-meter peak will be even more marvelous than it is from here.

6. Moonrise Ridge

You should be able to see a ridge that looks like it makes a long line against the sky. Can you see it? At night you can see the moon rise slowly over this ridge, which has given the Moonrise Ridge its name.

These long and level foothills that look like they cut right into the sky were a scene of tragedy during the Korean War. Although that history is now long past, this was a place that once saw fierce and bloody warfare.

7. The Dead Bride's Grave

If you walk a little further, you will find a reservoir almost big enough to be called a lake. On the hill overlooking the reservoir, you will see a villa and accommodation facilities. On this hill, there is a stone grave with absolutely no signs or markers.

According to a local legend, a young bride from this village took ill immediately after her wedding, and ended up in a sick bed at her parents' home. Because she was terminally ill and she knew it, she wanted to go say her final goodbyes to her husband before passing away, but she died here on the way to see the husband.

The parents of the bride wished to have the funeral at the husband's house for the sake of their daughter's spirit, but the parents of the groom refused to accept a dead bride and she ended up buried here. Some years later, the husband remarried, but when his new wife slept the spirit of the dead bride would appear in her dreams. The couple was so scared that they called a shaman to perform a ceremony.

The shaman told them that those passing by this spot must toss stones to build a mound, and the spirit of the dead bride would not appear again. The husband and his new bride begged people passing through this area to fulfill the shaman's instructions, and eventually this stone grave was created.

8. Superb Plum Trees

This village is famous for its plum trees. Amongst all the trees in the village you will notice one that stands out from the others. Here and there you will see markings cut into the bark but the girth of the trunk will give you an idea of the vitality of this long-lived tree. It was planted around 600 years ago by a renowned civil official who spent his youth in this area. Because of the tree's characteristic ability to flower during the winter, scholars and high-ranking officials of old Korea regarded it as a symbol of righteousness.

For this reason, most commoners weren't allowed to plant plum trees. However, as time has passed and the class system in Korea collapsed, anyone can plant them. The trees beyond the village road were planted in just this way.

9. The Temple that Broke with the World

There was a wonderful temple here 1000 years ago, but only two stone pagodas that resemble each other remain today.

The Buddhist temple built here in the 8th century was so prosperous that it is thought to have been large enough to encompass the entire area of the village today. Record has it that people had to walk 40 minutes from these pagodas before they could see the first inner gate of the temple. But what happened to the temple buildings, leaving only two pagodas behind?

During the peak of the temple's prosperity, the monks were disturbed by so many visitors that they renamed the temple to mean "the temple that's separated from the world" to let visitors know that they're not welcomed. After changing the temple's name, the number of visitors gradually declined and the temple became quiet once again. After some time had passed, the temple started accepting visitors again. But it had been separated from the world for so long that people forgot its existence. With no further visitors the once-great temple vanished quietly into history.

10. The School that Vanished

There used to be an elementary school here, built in 1965. At the time, those who had lived through the trials and tribulations of the Korean War realized the importance of education and built the school with their own hands. It began as a small, local, country school, but by 1980 it had grown to a size of almost 500 students.

But as families that lived here in Jirisan Mountain slowly but surely began to leave for the city, the student numbers dropped until the school itself was forced to close in 1993. These days, a number of people are banding together to push for the school to be revived as a culture space for the village and a workshop for artists.