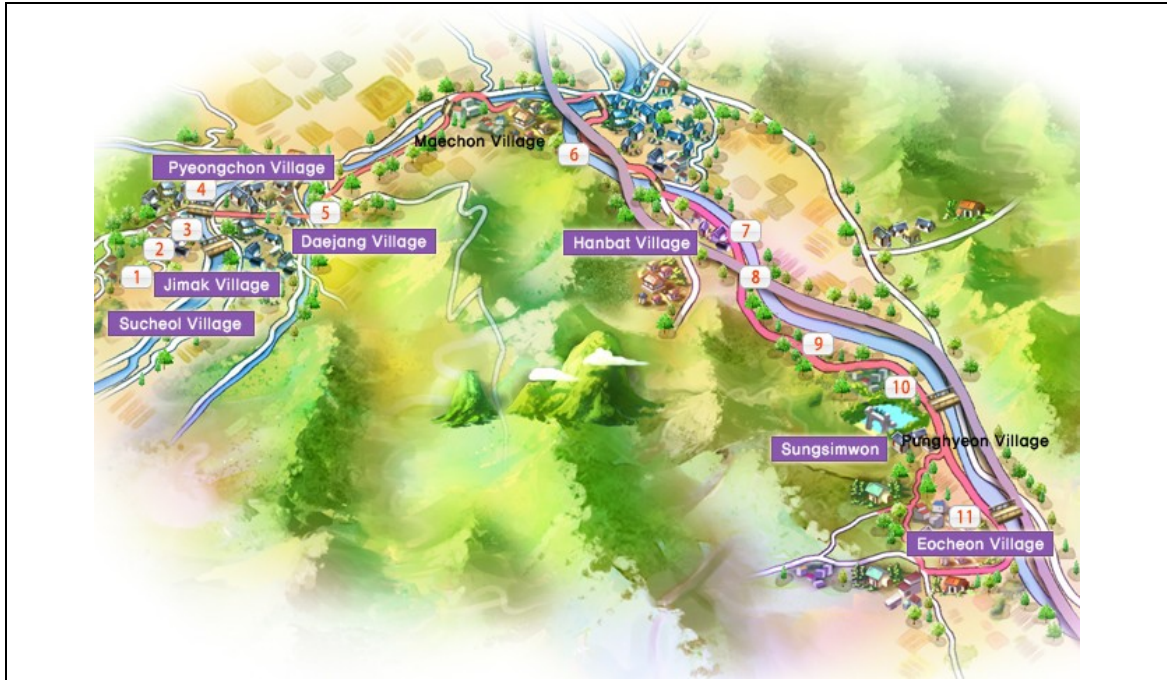


Sucheol-Eocheon Section

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1. About Sucheol-Eocheon Section

This section connects Sucheol and Eocheon. The path follows Gyeonghogang River and as you walk, the trail will change from asphalt to a riverside path and then to another path meandering through the woods. You'll also come across five different villages along the way.

On this section, you will hear a story about the beautiful friendship that existed between a famous scholar and his pupil during the Joseon Dynasty and other stories about the people that inhabit Jirisan Mountain. Shall we start our journey?

2. Village Covered with White Paper

Beyond the bridge that goes over the valley, you will arrive at a village. This village, known as “the village covered with white paper,” was once designated as a special administrative district for the production of paper used by the government. Up until twenty or thirty years ago, paper manufacturing was the main line of work for residents here.

Making paper was a complicated process. One step in the process involved hanging the wet paper outside to dry in the sun. This is how the village got its name, as with every household hanging paper outside to dry, it looked as if the whole village was covered in paper and the whole village looked white. The brilliant white sparkling in the sunshine against the backdrop of lush, green Jirisan Mountain must have been a unique and spectacular sight.

3. A Pavilion Waiting for Spring

If you continue walking past the village, you will come to a huge rock with some Chinese characters inscribed on it. A small, old pavilion stands on the two-story high rock. The name of the pavilion means “the observatory where spring comes.”

The path up to this rock is a little challenging, but once you are at the top you will have a spectacular, sweeping view of the entire area. They say that the scholars of the old days sat here to watch the scenery as they waited for the spring to come.

500 years ago, a scholar built this pavilion to demonstrate respect for his teacher. Whenever the teacher visited, the two of them would sit here to talk about academia while enjoying the natural environment surrounding the pavilion.

On one occasion, the scholar heard that his teacher had fallen ill and would not be able to visit. Upon hearing this news, the saddened scholar wrote a poem about his worries and longing for his teacher, further demonstrating how important the relationship was to him.

4. Place with “Mugwort under the Snow”

The name of the rocky hill rising beyond the bridge means a “place with mugwort under the snow”. The mugwort plant sprouts in the spring and for a long time has been used as both a foodstuff as well as a herbal medicine. The reason why this rocky outcrop is named such is as follows.

300 years ago, the mother-in-law of a woman who lived in this area was deathly ill. The mother-in-law asked for some mugwort soup and so to search for the mugwort, the woman headed out in the cold, blistering cold weather. Unfortunately, since mugwort grows in the spring, her desperate search in the cold was in vain. Feeling disheartened and tired, she took a seat here on the rocks and cried for a good while. When she finally stopped and glanced down at her feet, she noticed some mugwort growing under the snow. It was a gift from heaven, rewarding her devotion to her mother-in-law.

The story ends with the woman digging up the mugwort and making a batch of steaming soup for her mother-in-law, and the old woman recovered her health.

5. School with a Huge Stone Statue

Among the low roofs in the village, you will notice a tall stone statue towering over them. As you approach it, you will see that it is comprised of many statues of Buddha standing in a row. Around the Buddha statues, you will see the stone statues of twelve animal figures, which were considered for a long time to be the 12 deities protecting the world.

The building clearly looks like a school, but why would such a huge stone statue stand in the middle of the school grounds? Originally this place was an elementary school. But since many of the population have departed one by one for the cities, there aren't enough children to warrant keeping the school open. So it was closed down.

A Buddhist monk who taught music at this school was sad to see it disappear and with some help, he transformed the building into a place of meditation for Buddhist monks. Following the transformation, stone statues were built one by one and the place has now become a famous attraction for people in the area to come and visit.

6. Villages Disappearing from Jirisan Mountain

The village located on the top of the mountain was once home to some 60 households, but now there are only about 20 households left. With urbanization of nearby villages, people have moved out. This is the reason why it is especially hard to find people in this village. Most of the residents are over 70 years old.

There were once vast fields for farming in front of the village, but most of them have been turned into factory plants and it is hard to imagine the village as it once was. The chestnut tree farms once located in the foothills of the mountain are no longer in existence. If you do happen to meet any villagers here, please offer them a friendly greeting. They will return it with hospitality and a welcoming smile.

7. River as Clear as a Mirror

The official name of the river that runs alongside the road here means “a river that flows south”, but to the residents living here, it is called a name that means “a river that reflects the scenery as brightly and clearly as a mirror.” It was once famous for its clear water and beautiful scenic views.

This river not only provides beauty, but also is a source of the villagers’ livelihood. The fish caught in the river are used as ingredients for the special dishes that are unique to this region. A spicy, fish soup made with flour noodles is a local specialty.

Once, this area was bustling with people looking for gold. According to the old records, gold was discovered in abundance on the sandy riverbanks. The area was for some time swollen with people in search of gold and some even gained considerable wealth from this small gold rush.

In recent years, the river has become famous for river rafting. With constantly flowing water and a wide river bed, it is a perfect spot to go rafting and visitors very much enjoy the activity on the water.

8. Village with a Guardian Tree

At the entrance to this village, there stands a tree that is thought to protect the village, much like the sacred trees that appear in Greek mythology.

In this village, the residents still hold rituals for the tree. Although such guardian trees can be seen all over the Jirisan Mountain region, there are only a few villages left that still hold rituals to honor the trees and placate the guardian spirits.

Every lunar New Year's Day, a crowd gathers here to witness the ritual. There was once a larger, older tree that acted as the guardian but 20 years ago the tree fell due to a strong typhoon. Villagers planted the current tree on the same spot and continued to offer their respects just like in the past.

Beneath the tree is a large, broad rock, and this is also considered a protective, guardian spirit rock, one of seven in the village. Although the seven rocks are spread throughout the village, there are only two that are visible. The others are buried underground.

9. A Village that Shouldn't Dig a Well

The village that we have now come to is quite far away from the river. Because water wasn't easily accessible, the villagers needed to dig a well to supply the village but they were prevented from doing so by a rule that prohibited the digging of a well in this village. Although there is now an underground water supply, for many years residents had the strenuous task of transporting water home from the river.

The reason for the prohibition originated from the fact that the village is shaped like a boat. In Korea, there is a traditional theory that determines the auspices of a village based on the geography of the mountains and rivers. According to this theory, since this village is in shape of "a boat floating in the water," digging a well would be same as putting a hole in a boat.

The villagers believed that digging a well would be synonymous with putting a hole in their boat, and the boat would sink, indicating that misfortune would befall the village. Although it sounds superstitious now, the villagers only wanted to ensure the ongoing happiness and peace of their hometown.

10. Windy Hill

Planted around this gently-sloping hill are groves of chestnut trees. When the trees are in full bloom, you can smell the strong scent of the chestnut tree blossoms as you pass by the groves.

This place is famous for blustery wind. On a normal day, the breeze from a river located far down the valley is cool, but when the wind picks up it becomes very strong and it's difficult to walk or even to open your eyes. That is why the hill is known to locals as the 'windy hill.'

The residents of this village often pause here to rest for a moment and observe the shape of the clouds over the river as they pass over the hill to tend their rice paddies or visit the market.

They predict changes in the weather by looking at the clouds or observing how the clouds are moving across the sky over the river. Sometimes this type of forecast proves to be more accurate than the weather forecast report on the news, proving how marvelous nature truly is.

11. Sungsimwon

Sungsimwon, looking like a European village from the outside, is a home for people suffering from Hansen's disease, more commonly known as leprosy.

Even though, with the development of treatment drugs, there is no danger of disease transmission, Korean people are often still reluctant to live with those affected. This village was founded and built by a group of Catholic priests in 1959 for patients suffering from Hansen's disease and social isolation,

Recently, a Dulle-gil information center and accommodation facilities for travelers have been developed within the village. Although it was once totally isolated, the village is now making great efforts to open the center up little by little and connect with the people outside.

12. Fish Village

This village is called the "fish village" because there is such an abundance of fish to catch in the river that flows through the town. In particular, there are many flavorful and valuable mandarin fish to be caught, which are known as 'the fish of the palace,' or the 'fish with scales of silk.' In China, the mandarin fish is sometimes called 'the pork fished out of water,' and is considered to be very valuable fish. It tastes great when made into Korean-style spicy fish soup.

As you pass this village, you will see a small creek located within the village. It isn't very deep, and though small, it is a rather beautiful spot. Maybe for this reason, the area is becoming increasingly popular with tourists and accommodation facilities are being built here and there around the area.