Kasari Area, Amami City Tale of Shiroma Community

Kasari area is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea, and has small mountains with altitudes of 200m or less running north and south. On the east side, here lies a flatland where sugarcane and semi-tropical fruit fields are cultivated, and livestock is raised. Kasari Bay, one of " 500 Important Wetlands in Japan," designated by the Ministry of the Environment, covers the west side. Many communities in Kasari area inherit their traditional performing arts, passing their unique culture from generation to generation through their daily lives.

※ The scale below is presented as an approximate guideline.

0Km 1Km 2Km 3Km 4Km 5Km

Amami City HP

Administration: Amami City

Legend

- Toilet
- Shower
- Parking area
- Rest area
- Barrier-free toilet
- Kasari Branch, Amami City
- Major Sightseeing Spots and Facilities

Shiroma

Tofuru means "a pathway to the heavens." When the community was engaged in rice farming, it is said, many small shrimp, river prawns, and freshwater crabs were found in the rice paddy field and streams near the community. While the community grows sugar cane as the main produce today, shrimp are still found in the streams.

Stone Platform and White Clay

Mego river runs from west to east, passing through the prefectural road down to the ocean. Mego river divides Ushuku Community and Shiroma Community. The river is a haven of rest for people in both communities. In the old days, children used to jump into the river and catch eels and crabs, while women used to wash their hair with white clay. The downstream water was used for laundry and other daily activities.

Koirigashiki

At Mego river, the locals deify their water deity in July. It is believed that purifying young infants less than one year old at Mego river with its water ensures their good health and keeps them from potential accidents. After this ritual, *Koirigashiki*, people cook newly harvested rice along with some red beans. This ritual represents their fear of the river and the ocean, the senior residents say. This ritual is also called *Abirashi hajime* (initial bathing).

Coral Stone Wall

Many coral walls are found in the community, while few hewn stone walls are seen. The hewn stone wall at the Nakabas' residence site was built by the agricultural union of Manya and Shiroma communities when the Nakabas had their new house built. The area has similar stone walls, representing valuable assets of the community.

***Tofuru* Graves**

Horizontal hollows of the clan graves built into a short hill are called *Tofuru* graves. *Tofuru* means "a pathway to the heavens". *Tofuru* graves are situated on the west side of the community. This 16m tall hill is formed of a layer of sandstone. The average dimension of the hollows is approx. 1.6m high and approx. 3.6m deep. Graves #1 - #9 are found within a 100m diameter, and their sizes are almost the same.

***Tofuru* graves in the Graveyard**

Each *Tofuru* grave is a family grave. Some of them, including #4 in the public cemetery are visited by their descendants on a regular basis. The inside of the horizontal hollow is a flask-like shape, representing the womb of a pregnant woman, that allows the deceased to be reborn. Some rooms have a platform to lay the bodies. Some have bones of a few hundred people. The bones are placed in funerary urns before being reburied.

Coral Well

There is a wide river where children can swim on the north side of the community and a narrow one on the south side. People used water from the well and river for farming, while spring water and water from specific wells was used for drinking. Among such drinking water resources, the community people frequently used the common well with a rectangular coral fence located halfway down to *hamajiyo guchi* (pathway leading to the beach). The well is no longer used today and is covered by grass.

***Ikusa Bama* Beach**

Ikusa bama (battle beach) is named after a heavy battle which occurred when the Ryukyu Kingdom (Okinawa) troops landed on Amami Oshima for its 3rd subjugation of rebels in 1571. A number of ships from far oceans visited this area in the old days. The senior locals recall that Shiroma used to have a lot of beautiful women. Many of them went to Kikaijima island and never came back, they say.

Ceylon Blue Glassy Tiger Butterflies' Wintering Spot

Ikusa bama beach extends from Manya Community to Ushuku Community. This large sand dune has a number of *hamajiyo guchi* pathways. The dune has clusters of textile screw pine trees (lauhala) and tall beefwood trees, providing wintering spots for Ceylon blue glassy tiger butterflies en masse when the temperature is below 10℃.