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# Kii Mountain Range (Japan) No 1142 Bis

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## 1 Basic data

### State Party

Japan

### Name of property

Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range

### Location

Mie, Nara and Wakayama Prefectures

### Inscription

2004

### Brief description

Set in the dense forests of the Kii Mountains overlooking the Pacific Ocean, three sacred sites – Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, Koyasan – linked by pilgrimage routes to the ancient capital cities of Nara and Kyoto, reflect the fusion of Shinto, rooted in the ancient tradition of nature worship in Japan, and Buddhism, which was introduced from China and the Korean Peninsula. The sites (495.3 ha) and their surrounding forest landscape reflect a persistent and extraordinarily well-documented tradition of sacred mountains over 1,200 years. The area, with its abundance of streams, rivers and waterfalls, is still part of the living culture of Japan and is much visited for ritual purposes and hiking, with up to 15 million visitors annually. Each of the three sites contains shrines, some of which were founded as early as the 9th century.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of report

11 March 2016

## 2 Issues raised

### Background

The Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range were inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (ii), (iii), (iv) and (vi). The property was said to cover a total area of 495.3 hectares, and included 23 components, with a total buffer zone area of 1,137 ha. In 2004, the World Heritage Committee (Decision: 28 COM 14B.28) asked Japan to prepare a detailed medium-term management plan to ensure the sustainability of the natural and cultural features of this particularly fragile property, to provide it with visitor facilities and to remove the unsightly overhead cables in the area. Furthermore, the ICOMOS report stressed that it

was essential to ensure that: “the nominated areas are sustainable from a forestry management point of view – particularly the narrow corridors surrounding the pilgrims’ routes, as the ‘natural’ elements of the site are strongly associated with the cultural values of spirituality”. The management plan was submitted in 2006. It set out practical measures to document and preserve the site, considered as living natural and cultural heritage, and procedures to be followed in carrying out necessary changes. The minor modification proposal presented in 2016 is the result of the documentation and management efforts set out in the plan of 2006.

### Modification

The proposed modification essentially concerns the pilgrimage routes. The first route (Omine Okugakemichi) linking the northern and southern sites of Yoshino and Omine to Kumano Sanzan, is unaffected. The second and third routes, however, are both affected. The second (Kumano Sankeimichi) connects the extreme south of the property (Kumano Sanzan) to Kyoto and the rest of Japan, via three sub-routes, running along the coast to the west (Kijji) and to the east (Iseji), and to the north via the peninsula to Kôyasan (Kohechi); the third route (Kôyasan Chôishimichi), which is 24 km long, was created by the founder of the temple at Kongobu-ji, the high priest Kukai, to connect the temple to the administrative buildings of Jison-ji (both are part of the Kôyasan site). This route has been named after the stone signposts (*chôishi*) set along the path at intervals of 109 m (a distance termed *cho*).

Kumano Sankeimichi, the pilgrimage route to Kumano Sanzan - the most popular in Medieval and modern times - has seen its frequentation increase since the World Heritage List inscription. Its area of 129.6 hectares would be increased by 7.3 ha to a total of 136.9 ha. The extensions affect the Kijji sub-route, which in turn is divided into two parts: Nakahechi, which crosses the Kii peninsula, and Ohechi, which runs along the coast. Nakahechi leads to all the shrines of Kumano Sanzan and also includes various *Ôji* shrines, dedicated to the child gods of the Kumano deity (21 such shrines are included in the inscribed property). Ohechi is 120 km in length, and was the route taken by ascetic followers of the Saigoku pilgrimage. It includes 4 teahouses and several of its sections would be re-established.

Kôyasan chôishimichi in fact included several routes, depending on the point at which pilgrims arrived on the peninsula. The re-establishment of its 4 sub-routes would restore the unity of their historic circumnavigation, and the route would accordingly be renamed Kôya Sankeimichi (this would refer not to a specific route, but to a complete network comparable with that of Kumano Sankeimichi). Its area of 14.3 hectares would be increased by 3.8 ha to make a total of 18.1 ha, in particular by the use of a route that was favoured by the imperial family and another route used by women (women were not allowed into Kôyasan until 1872, and used this route to reach prayer-giving sites considered appropriate for them, known as Nyonin-dô).

The modifications would result in a 13% increase in the length of the pilgrimage routes (from 307.6 km to 347.7 km), but the total area of the property would rise by only 2.2%. The maps (of exemplary resolution) and the visual plates supplied indicate that the sections concerned are well-known routes, that are either in their original condition, or capable of being appropriately restored. Archaeological excavations and cadastral research from 2011 to 2014 have demonstrated the feasibility of the works and/or the authenticity of the remains concerned. Their addition would thus ultimately strengthen the specific features of the route network (form, linearity, thickness and height of pavements, surfacing, associated landscape).

The sectors marked are to be covered by the Japanese law on cultural property protection from March 2016 onwards.

Overall, the proposed extension would reinforce the integrity and authenticity of the property, by improving the ratio of components and guaranteeing the authenticity of the form and materials of the paths, which would be carefully checked. Two roads currently projected will thus be diverted away from the zone thus protected and from the buffer zone, so that there would be no threat to the environment's visual integrity. The property management and preservation plans have been modified to allow for these changes.

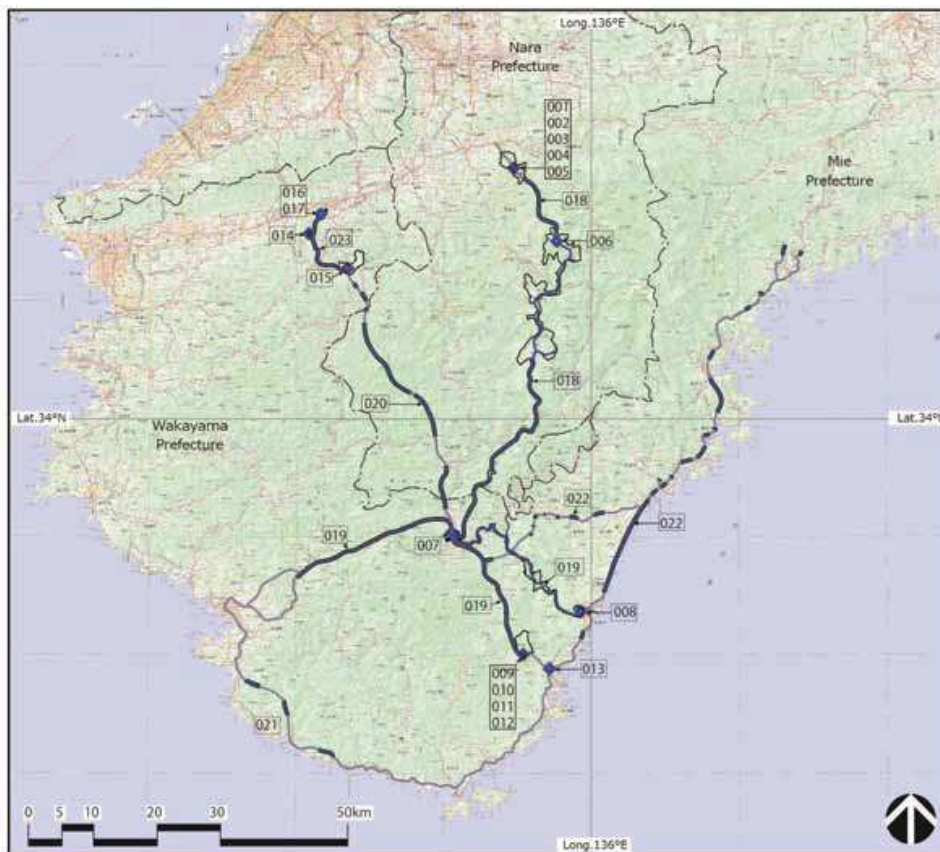
### **3 ICOMOS recommendations**

#### **Recommendations with respect to inscription**

ICOMOS recommends that the proposal for a minor modification of the boundaries of the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range, Japan, be **approved**.

#### **Additional recommendations**

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party clarify whether other modifications of a similar nature are being considered.



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|  | <p><b>Component of sacred sites</b> &lt;Component parts&gt;</p> <p>(1) Yoshino and Ōmine<br/>         001 Yoshinoyama<br/>         002 Yoshino Mikumari-jinja<br/>         003 Kimpu-jinja<br/>         004 Kimpusen-ji<br/>         005 Yoshimizu-jinja<br/>         006 Ōminesan-ji</p> <p>(2) Kumano Sanzan<br/>         007 Kumano Hongū Taisha<br/>         008 Kumano Hayatama Taisha<br/>         009 Kumano Nachi Taisha<br/>         010 Seiganto-ji<br/>         011 Nachi no Ōtaki<br/>         012 Nachi Primeval Forest<br/>         013 Fudarakusan-ji</p> <p>(3) Kōyasan<br/>         014 Niutsuhime-jinja<br/>         015 Kongōbu-ji<br/>         016 Jison-in<br/>         017 Niukanshōfu-jinja</p> <p>(4) Pilgrimage routes<br/>         018 Ōmine Okugakemichi<br/>             Kumano Sankeimichi<br/>         019 Nakahechi<br/>         020 Kohechi<br/>         021 Ōhechi<br/>         022 Iseji<br/>         023 Kōyasan Chōishimichi</p> |
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Map showing the revised boundaries of the property