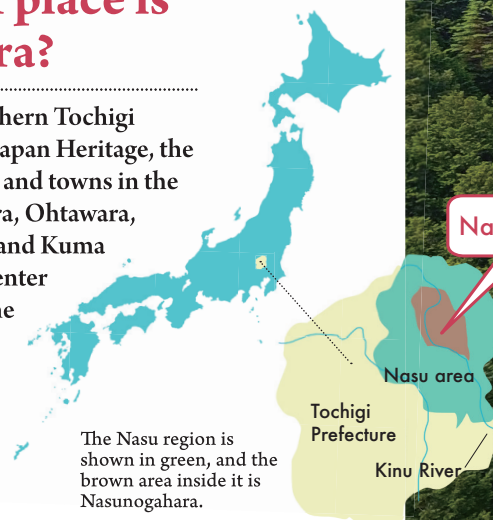


# Nasunogahara, the agricultural frontier of the Meiji era

Nasunogahara is a vast plateau in the Nasu region. While it was one of the largest wildland areas of Honshu, agriculture was not introduced here until the Meiji era. The region lacked the water necessary for agriculture, but it developed as people worked hard to reclaim the wildlands.

## What kind of place is Nasunogahara?

Nasunogahara lies in northern Tochigi Prefecture. According to Japan Heritage, the area consists of four cities and towns in the Nasu region: Nasushiobara, Ohtawara, Yaita, and Nasu. The Sabi and Kuma Rivers flow through the center of Nasunogahara, while the Naka River runs to the northeast and the Houki River runs to the southwest.



The Nasu region is shown in green, and the brown area inside it is Nasunogahara.

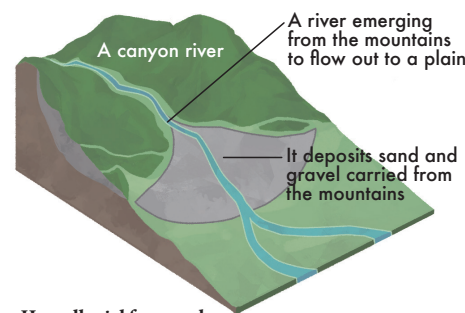
Nasunogahara



▲ Duke Matsukata's Villa in Nasunogahara

### 1 One of Japan's largest alluvial fans

An alluvial fan is terrain created by triangle-shaped deposits of sand and gravel that is carried down from mountains by rivers. Composite alluvial fans are formed when multiple alluvial fans combine, and Nasunogahara is one of the largest in Japan.



**How alluvial fans work**  
The sand and gravel deposits are thickest at the entrance to the canyon, and gradually thin out the further they get from the canyon.

### 2 The once vast wildlands

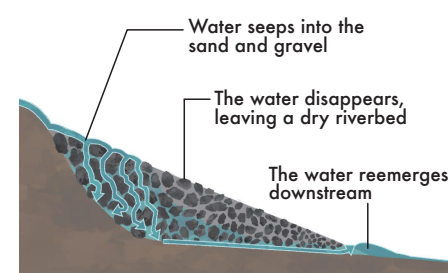
The Nasunogahara region was once covered by two vast wildland plains called Nasunishihara and Nasuhigashihara. The wild grasses and reeds that flourished in the wildlands were an important source of thatching for roofs and feed for horses.



Wild grasses and reeds reminiscent of the wildlands of the Meiji era. Places where these grasses and reeds (known as kaya) were harvested are called *kayaba*.

### 3 A river without water—the Sabi River

Despite its name, no water can be seen along the Sabi River, making it one of the characteristic sights of the Nasunogahara area. The water seeps underground, leaving the riverbed full of dry rocks. Water flows in the river only after heavy rains, etc.

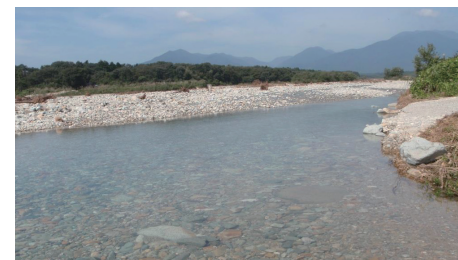


Water seeps into the thick sand and gravel deposits in the upper part of the Sabi River, and no water flows along the riverbed. There is less sand and gravel downstream, so the water emerges to flow along the surface.

#### The Sabi River with no water



#### The Sabi River with water



## One of the largest wildland reclamation projects in Japan and the Meiji Aristocrats

The Meiji era saw an influx of Western culture as the country sought to accelerate its development. Various industries thrived amid efforts toward national prosperity. It was against this backdrop that Nasunogahara, with some of the largest wildlands in Japan, became the focus of efforts to develop it for agricultural use and reclamation began at the hands of the Meiji aristocratic class as well as prominent locals.



▶▶ One of the driving forces behind the nobles involved in developing Nasunogahara was a desire to emulate Western nobles who had vast lands at their disposal.

