



FY2025 an Okinawa Prefecture Historic Site

Nodake Sudi Banabira Stone-paved Road Panel Exhibition

This panel exhibition introduces the unique characteristics and cultural significance of the Sudi Banabira, a stone-paved road that once served as an official post road, connecting the Ginowan and Nakagusuku districts. Even after it has served its original function, it remained an essential part of the residents' daily lives. Although parts of the road have been lost to residential developments, recent findings have reaffirmed its historical importance, and has officially been designated as an Okinawa Prefecture History Site.

July 28th ~ September 28th

* Hosted by Ginowan City Cultural Affairs Division

* Co-hosted by Ginowan City Museum

★ **Congratulations** ★

Officially designated as
an Okinawa Prefecture Historic Site



Greetings

Introducing the Nodake Sudi Banabira Ishidatami Michi (Stone-paved Road), a site designated as a municipal historic site, we as the Ginowan City Board of Education, Cultural Affairs Division, have been conducting cultural surveys with the aim of preserving its cultural significance. As a result of these efforts, the historical and cultural value of the site has been reaffirmed, and it has officially been designated as an Okinawa Prefecture Historic Site.

We are pleased to present this panel exhibition in hopes of promoting awareness and appreciation of this important cultural asset. Alongside this exhibition, there will be preservation projects to take place this year, and moving forward, we will continue to work closely with the local community to ensure its long-term conservation.

Ginowan City is home to four historic routes that were created during the Ryukyu Kingdom era; the Nakagamihou Seikaido, Futenma Sankeimichi, Bansho Road (which includes the Sudi Banabira Stone-paved Road), and Oyama Kunjan Abushi. We are currently striving to have these routes added to the existing National Historic Site in neighboring Urasoe City, the Nakagamihou Seikaido and Futenma Sankeido, as these routes are deeply connected.

We hope this exhibition offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of Ginowan City's rich history and culture. By learning about these precious heritage and the efforts made to preserve them, we believe it can inspire a meaningful connection among community members today, and encourage participation in community building efforts.

Finally, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education, the Kitanakagusuku Board of Education, the Nakagusuku Board of Education, the Nodake District 1 Residence Association, and the Ginowan City Museum for their invaluable support in organizing this exhibition. We wish for its great success.

28th July 2025

Ginowan City Board of Education

Cultural Affairs Division Section Chief, Fumiharu Yohena

What is 'Sudi Banabira' ?

Ginowan City is home to four traditional post roads, referred to as the 'Historical Roads of Ginowan'. Among these, the Nodake Sudi Banabira Stone-paved Road, located in Ginowan City Aza Nodake Asatu Batakibaru, formed part of the Banju Michi (Bansho Road), which connected the Ginowan Bansho (administrative post) to the Nakagusuku Bansho located within the Nakagusuku Castle.

Today, the route is classified as a public footpath that lies along the boundary between Ginowan City, Adaniya of Kitanakagusuku, and Noborimata of Nakagusuku; and features a dramatic elevation of over 30 meters between Ginowan and Nakagusuku. The stone-paved road, measured at approximately 3 meters wide and 150 meters long, stretches along the slope down to the *Ga-ja* Bridge, which spans across the Futenma River at the Nakagusuku border.

The name 'Sudi Banabira' is Okinawan dialect for 'sleeve-tearing slope'. According to legend, this name originated during the Gosamaru-Awamori Rebellion in 1458, under the ruling of Sho Taikyū. As the forces of Awamori pursued the fleeing family of Gosamaru from the Nakagusuku Castle, his wife and children were caught on this very slope- one of them reportedly grabbed by the sleeve, which was torn apart during the struggle. If this account is believed to be true, the route may have been used for over 500 years, though the exact date of the stone paving remains unclear.

According to an early map, the Shouhokuni Ezu (Map of Shouho), believed to have been produced in 1648, there is no depiction of the Banju Road that includes the Sudi Banabira. However, it does appear on the Ryukyukoku Souezu (General map of Ryukyu Kingdom), created in the late 18th century. Based on this, it is likely that the 'Historical Roads of Ginowan', aside from the Nakagamihou Seikaido, became official post roads following the establishment of the Ginowan Magiri in 1671. Therefore, though this path predates to this period, the stone paving likely does not go back earlier than 1671.

Even after the abolition of the Ryukyu Kingdom and the end of its purpose as an official post road, the Sudi Banabira remains an important connection between Ginowan and Nakagusuku. It is also mentioned by Uesugi Mochinori; governor appointed in 1881 (Showa 14), in his reports, Uesugi Kenrei Junkai Nisshi (Travel Diary of Governor Uesugi), of his travel along the Nodake Zaka (slope) from Ginowan to Nakagusuku's Bansho.

For local residents, the stone-paved road was essential to daily life. Many farmers in Nodake owned fields in Nakagusuku and used this route regularly for agricultural work and gathering animal feed. Likewise, people from Nakagusuku and Kitanakagusuku relied on this route to transport sugarcane, sell vegetables in Futenma, or commute to school. Therefore, the Sudi Banabira served as a vital symbol of both livelihood and community life.

Cultural Property Designation and Research Background

In 1933 (Showa 8), a construction of a prefectural road through the middle of the Sudi Banabira, divided the stone-paved road into east and west sections. Hence, residents of Nakagusuku began primarily using the eastern section of the stone-paved road, going past the constructed prefectural road to travel toward the Futenma area; resulting in a decline in the use of the western section of the road. After the war, developments of the transportation network further contributed to the gradual decline in the 1970s.

Amid these circumstances, the western section of the stone-paved road near the Nodake settlement began to deteriorate due to residential development. Moreover, the path was buried under the waste soil disposal, leading to its complete destruction and presumed loss. In response, to preserve the eastern section of the stone-paved road, the head of Nodake District 1 Resident' s Association submitted a request in October 1988 (Showa 63), for it to be designated a cultural property. On March 31st, 1989 (Heisei 1), it was officially designated as a municipal historic site; under the name Nodake Ishidatami Michi (Nodake Stone-paved Road).

Meanwhile, a survey conducted in 1982 (Showa 57) by the Ginowan Board of Education prior to the prefectural road' s widening project, it was reported that the western section of the road had almost been entirely destroyed and therefore, not designated as a cultural property. However, due to requests from Nodake residents to include the western section in restoration efforts, the city initiated an investigation into the preservation status of that section.

A test excavation survey conducted in FY2019 (Reiwa 1) revealed that part of the stone-paved road remained underground. Consequently in FY2022 (Reiwa 4), an evaluative trenching survey was carried out to determine the extent and condition of the remaining path; confirming that a significant portion of the path still existed.

Following a deliberation by the Cultural Property Protection Council held in January 2023 (Reiwa 5), it was decided on 21st February of the same year to officially add the western section of stone-paved road to the previously designated eastern section. At the same time, the name was changed to what we now know as, Nodake Sudi Banabira Ishidatami Michi, incorporating the place name. Consequently, the preservation and maintenance project which had been under preparation since FY2022 (Reiwa 4), and evaluative trenching survey was officially implemented.

To fully uncover the western section of the path, a backhoe was used in the evaluative trenching surveys conducted in FY2023 (Reiwa 5). The results showed that although the road had suffered damage, it remained intact and retained its original form than initially expected.

The Main Features of Sudi Banabira

With the cooperation of Nodake District 1 Resident's Association, the City's Board of Education conducted interviews with locals who had first-hand memories of the Sudi Banabira before it was buried. According to the community elders, the path was built upon an earthen embankment, with sago palms planted along both sides. While pine trees were often associated with traditional post roads, sago palms were especially rare. The planting of sago palms could have been a method to aid in the preservation and maintenance of the stone-paved road, as it helped prevent damage to the path itself through its roots which do not spread extensively, while simultaneously reinforcing the soil along the edges.

Currently, several large sago palms still remain on the eastern section of the path, with only a few found on the western section. To restore the historic site's original characteristics, the city plans to reintroduce sago palms to the western section.

In the residents' interviews, different characteristics of the site was shared: "the western section was wider than the eastern", "the western path was bumpier than the eastern, but that made it easier to climb". Initially, these differences were thought to be memory errors, as both sides were originally part of the same road that later split due to the construction of a prefectural road in 1933 (Showa 8). However, recent archaeological findings confirmed its accuracy- as the western path uncovered is indeed 30 centimeters wider, and feature larger stones. These differences likely reflect the distinct terrain, as the slope on the western section of the path was steeper. Thus, the path was made to slightly curve to ease the ascent, and larger stones were used to help travelers move safely.

Moreover, landscape specialist Mr. Hiroshi Tada, who worked on the preservation of national cultural properties like the Nakamura juutaku (Nakamura House), noted that the western path includes an intentional flat section on the uphill slope- another feature that made climbing easier.

For the residents to have recalled these specific details of the Sudi Banabira from over 40 years ago, truly conveys the significant role in which the stone-paved road played in the community's daily lives.

Excavation findings also uncovered evidence of repairs made to the stone path, such as the path's sudden wideness at the bottom of the western slope. Soil layers from this section revealed a disturbance to the original soil layer, and contained artifacts of Chinese porcelain dating to the late Early Modern period to the early Modern era. Near this widened section, the path transitions into a stair-like structure- likely constructed afterwards. As the Sudi Banabira once served as a traditional post road during the Ryukyu Kingdom era, with royal messengers possibly passing through on horseback, it is believed that the original path was a gradual slope.

While the exact purpose for the modifications remain unknown, it reflects the continued importance to the community. The City Board of Education plans to protect the modified sections as part of the site's restoration- honoring both the history, and the people who kept its memory alive.

Ongoing efforts to preserve Sudi Banabira

With the goal of raising public awareness of the Sudi Banabira and introducing local excavation surveys, the Ginowan City Board of Education produced a series of videos titled Excavation Reports (Hakkutsu Chousa Sokuhou), available on the city's official YouTube channel. As of May 2025, five videos have been uploaded, providing an overview of the evaluative trenching surveys and excavations conducted through FY2023, along with insights from locals.

In FY2024, the city hosted a public lecture series titled Cultural Heritage of the Nodake Sudi Banabira Ishidatami Michi, aimed to deepen community understanding of the preservation project and encourage future use of the restored site. Speakers of the lecture include city officials involved in the construction work; Mr. Yoshikatsu Goya, former Section Chief of Ginowan City Cultural Affairs who conducted the surveys over 40 years ago; Mr. Seikou Arakaki and Mr. Yoshinobu Matsukawa, both prewar-born Nodake residents; Mr. Tada, landscape specialist familiar with traditional Ryukyu gardens, and tour guide for the city's cultural property tour, Satto no Kai; and Mr. Makio Hashimoto, Secretary General of Japan's Archaeology and Heritage Tourism. Together, many layers of the Sudi Banabira's value were explored while presenting the latest updates on the conservation project (available on the official YouTube channel).

Meanwhile, the city called on the public for any photographs or illustrations of the Sudi Banabira through local newspapers. However, no images were found as the path had long been embedded into the routine of daily life, where visual documentation was not deemed necessary.

With no photographs or images, a water color illustration was created to depict Sudi Banabira as it likely appeared around 1955- a time frequently referenced by the residents in their interviews. The image was created by Ms. Sana Kaneda, a fourth year student at Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts (FY2024), under the guidance of University of Ryukyu's Professor Shinichi Aso (formerly at Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts), and Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts Professor Fumiaki Harimoto.

To ensure the historic site remains a living part of the community, a new local group called the Sudi Banabira Preservation and Use Society (Preservation Society for short) was launched in March 2025. The main focus of the group, consisting of volunteers interested in local history, culture and heritage preservation, is to support and encourage the use of the stone-paved road, as well as other cultural properties in Nodake.

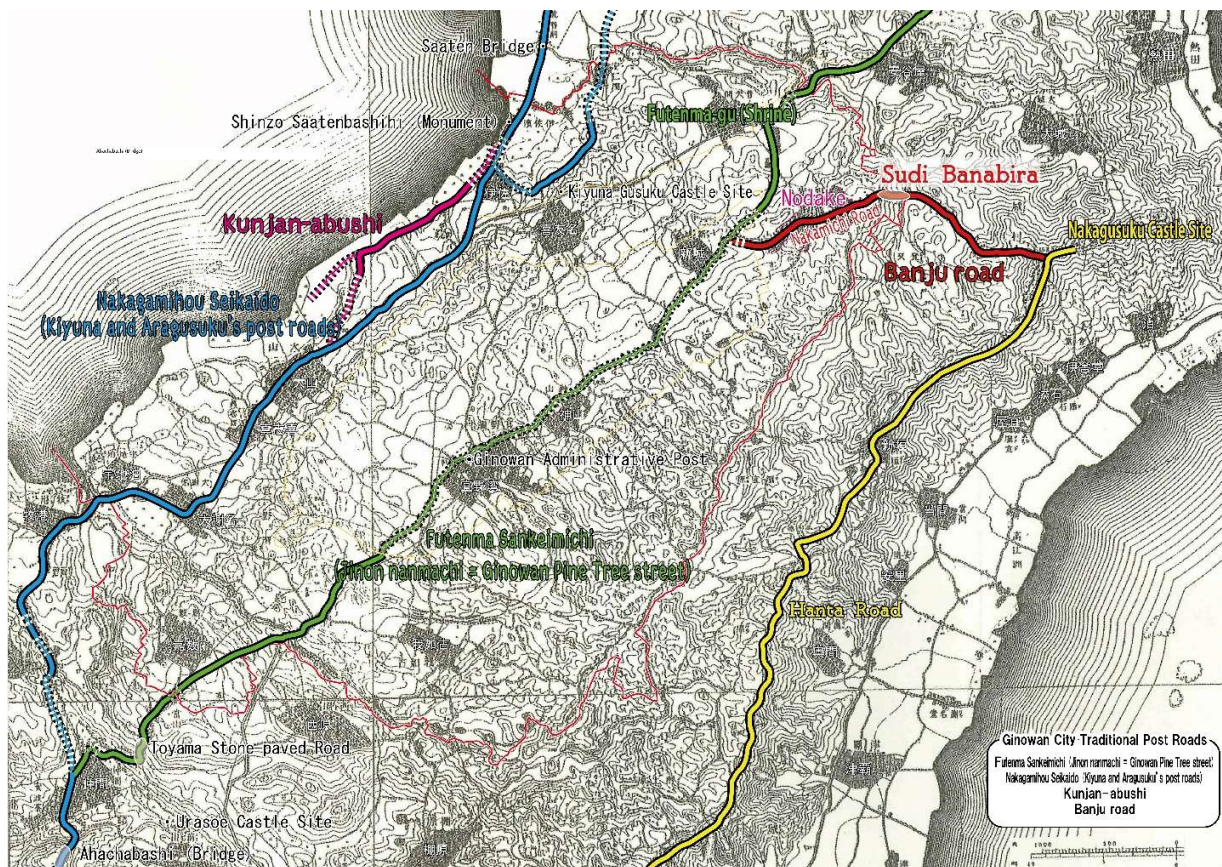
Going forward, the group will begin holding study sessions to develop a broader action plan for 2026. As part of this, the city will continue the public lecture series in September. If anyone is interested, please check the city's newsletter or the Cultural Affairs Division's website for details.

Hope for the future

Through the excavation surveys and insight from residents, the historical significance and retained condition of the Sudi Banabira have been reaffirmed, and on 27th June 2025, became an officially designated Historic Site of Okinawa Prefecture. Consequently, the city will be working to have the Historical Roads of Ginowan, which includes the Sudi Banabira, toward national designation. By doing so, our aim is not only to ensure its protection, but also to utilize these valuable cultural properties for the benefit of revitalizing the community.

The Preservation Society that recently launched holds great potential to turn local cultural properties into tourism assets that support community development. It is our sincere hope that this may inspire those who are not particularly interested in such topics, to appreciate the social value of preserving such sites.

As modern development is expected to increase- especially with the return of military base lands- the city recognizes the urgent need to protect as many cultural assets as possible. To achieve this goal that requires greater public awareness and cooperation, Ginowan City will continue to discover ways to connect people with their cultural heritage and ensure its place in the community' s future.



▲Ginowan City Traditional Post Roads

