





Exploring the Mysteries of Chi Chai Lake

Taiwan's high mountains are full of mysterious sights. The uniquely beautiful Chi Chai Lake adds an air of mystery to its mountain setting. To lift the shroud of mystery and view the marvelous scenery at the heart of Taiwan's Central Mountain Range, we loaded up our gear and set off on the grueling "4WD + 2" trek to the lake.

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Setting out from Shuili, we passed through Tili Village and eventually came to the Sunhai Bridge. Ahead of us lay only the snaking Chuoshui River valley, choked in places with fallen rocks. We gazed in wonder at the beauty of the gorge as we proceeded to negotiate the steep uphill terrain.

We reached the guard station, where the Type A mountain passes that we had obtained earlier were inspected, and entered the off-road section of the Tanta Forest Road. Because this road (still under construction) is heavily used, it's dusty in good weather and extremely muddy in rainy weather. To keep their



bikes clean, our experienced companions had already put them inside our trusty jeeps. The winding road had climbed steeply since we left Shuili, and the vehicle mileage was far greater than the actual distance we had traveled. We were dependent on our altimeter and watches to judge our position on the map.

The main purpose of this



▲ The road follows the winding Chuoshui River valley with its huge fallen boulders from Shuili through Tili Village and all the way to the Sunhai Bridge.

trip was to explore these backroads and go down to check out Kashe Creek. Kashe Creek originates from the south side of the Kanchuowan Mountain District and is one of the main upper tributaries of the Chuoshui River. Considered the most beautiful tributary of the Chuoshui River, Kashe Creek has been nicknamed the “Crystal Palace.” But although we had hoped to continue riding our mountain bikes from Haitien Temple, when we arrived at Tanyeh Farm some local people told us that the road had been temporarily closed while the harvest of high-altitude vegetables was underway. Just when everyone was despondent at this setback, the villagers also told us that road conditions on the route to Chi Chai Lake were good, and that 4WD vehicles should be able to make it as far as the lakeside power line maintenance shelter. This was quite different from the trip we had planned, and

we knew that, in order to protect the fragile environment, motor vehicles shouldn’t come close to the lake. This inspired us to pick up our pace in hope of camping near the lake by nightfall. We looked forward to seeing sunrise and the dazzling multicolored play of light on the water - the legendary enchantments of Chi Chai Lake - on the following day.

Location of Chi Chai Lake

Chi Chai Lake is located at an elevation of 2,880 meters along the boundary between Hsinyi Township in Nantou County and Wanjung Township in Hualien County, near the central point of the Central Mountain Range. A forest road leads from the town of Shuili through Tili Village and over the Sunhai Bridge (Wanta Creek and Kashe Creek join at this

point to become the Chuoshui River). The Tanta Forest Road, which winds its way through the high peaks of the Central Mountain Range for over 70 kilometers, was built in earlier days for logging and farming in mountainous areas. While logging came to an end some years ago, the road is still maintained for use in tree-planting and forestry work. A high-voltage power line was built along the road a few years ago as part of the plan to transfer electricity from western to eastern Taiwan. This power line is now used to bring electricity from Mingtan Reservoir to Fenglin Township in Hualien County, and the Tanta forest road and Wanjung forest road have been joined to facilitate maintenance work.

► The road down to Kashe Creek is a rough, cross-country track consisting mainly of flat and downhill sections.



▼ The road to Tanyeh Farm passes by majestic Tanszu Chi Chai Waterfall.





▲ The road from Chitsai Lake down to the trailhead passes through a thick mountain forest.



▲ Gazing at Chi Chai Lake at dawn from a nearby peak.



▲ Watching the sunrise from the high mountains is an extraordinary experience

A High Mountain Sunrise Prelude

The sky had already turned silvery gray like a fish's belly by 4:30 in the morning. We got on our steeds and followed the trail up to the lakeside. It took no more than 20 minutes to reach the high point near Chi Chai Lake. Around 5:30, the pink clouds, the emerging sun, and the sea of clouds below were like an orchestra playing a well-rehearsed prelude to our ardent applause. By the time we returned to the lakeside after watching the sunrise, even just standing there was enough to make us feel that the trip had been worthwhile. The lake shone like a mirror, and the sparkling

sunrays coaxed a wealth of hues from its depths. This captivating lake is lovely from every angle, and it's not surprising that many people believe that Chi Chai Lake is Taiwan's holiest lake.

We later rode our mountain bikes down the 12 kilometers offroad from the lake to the trailhead. This section of the road passes through unspoiled mountain forests, and although it generally descends, there are many ups and downs, and it is well suited to full suspension bikes. We made it back to the trailhead by noon, and then prepared to return home and ended our challenging and unforgettable trip. ■

