



JR East Series E127 DC train running on bridge between Chikuni and Hakuba Oike on Oito Line

The first line opened in 1915 between Kitamatsumoto and Toyoshina as the private Shinano Railway and was gradually extended from Kitamatsumoto to Matsumoto and from Toyoshina to Shinano Omachi. The line was electrified in 1926 and Shinano Railway started electric services. Around the same time, the Government Railways constructed a line between Shinano Omachi and Yanaba, which was then extended to Nakatsuchi. Shinano Railway was nationalized in 1937 and the line was renamed the Oito South Line. The line from Itoigawa had been constructed as the Oito North Line, and the section between Itoigawa and Kotaki opened in 1935. Construction of the remaining section between Kotaki and Nakatsuchi was suspended due to the war but was restarted in 1952 by Japanese National Railways (JNR) that had succeeded the government railways in 1949. Finally, the entire JNR Oito Line opened on 15 August 1957 but was divided again at the 1987 JNR privatization and division. Today, JR East operates services on the 70.1-km section between Matsumoto and Minamiotari, and JR West operates on the 35.3-km section between Minamiotari and Itoigawa. (See *JRTR 35* for more details of the Oito Line.)

(Photo: M. Mashima Photo Office)



Children's horseback archery in Shinano Omachi

Mounted archery (yabusame) in Shinano Omachi is believed to have started during the Kamakura Period (around 1185–1333). Today, it is a Shinto ritual in which young boys dressed in traditional costume play the role of archer shooting at targets from horseback in the local historic shrine to pray for a good harvest and banish evil spirits. Every year, 10 boys aged 6 to 9 from each local district are chosen to become blessed by the gods and hand on this traditional ritual to the next generation.

(Photo: Omachi City)

