

A Large Scale Analysis of Relations between Plant Communities and Physical Conditions in Semi-natural Grassland at Kawatabi, Miyagi Prefecture

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I Introduction

Studies on the relations between vegetation and the surrounding physical factors (landforms, climate and so on) are conducted not only in large areas but also in small ones. The present report is a fundamental effort to clarify these kinds of relationships. In order to understand these relation in full detail, the writer felt that a microscopic and detailed study should be made, and in this regard, executed this investigation, so-to-speak, on the largest possible scale.

From the standpoint of a small scale or a large area, for example, the forest and its mantle community are described by one designation as a "series of alternation"¹⁾. However, here the scale employed permits these to be recognized separately.

II General description of the study area

The study area lies in the Experimental Farm of Tohoku University at Kawatabi, Miyagi Prefecture, Northeast Japan, and occupies part of an undulating upland of about 400–600 m above sea-level (Fig. 1). In this upland, roughly speaking, wide, round ridges and shallow valleys, (the so-called "*Mudental*"), with wide, round valley floors in cross-section alternate, and the present study area lies in one of these shallow valleys (Fig. 2).

A shallow valley does not have a smooth longitudinal profile as it may be divided into several sections separated by breaks. Each such section consists of three parts; that is, i) a convex part, which seems to be a valley head, in the uppermost situation of the section, ii) a flat part like a valley floor and iii) a slope surrounding i) and ii) as a valley side. The present study area (Fig. 2-P) consists of a part of the flat valley floor of the highest section (Fig. 2-X), the whole of the second section (Fig. 2-Y) and a very small part of the head of the third section (Fig. 2-Z) (see Chapter 5).

1) For example, "topographischer Gesellschaftskomplex" (Seibert 1968).



Fig. 1 Location of the study area

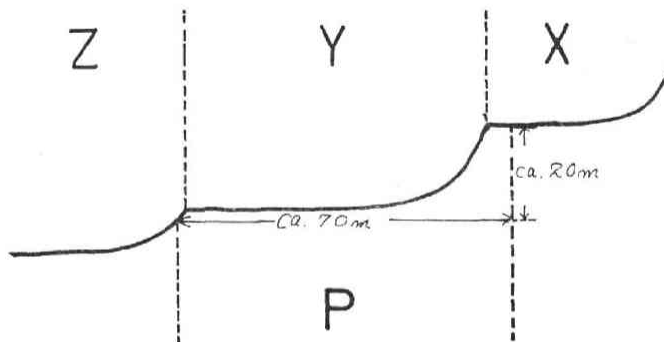


Fig. 2 Schematic profile of the unitary valleys
 P: study area X: the highest (first) section Y: the second section
 Z: the third section

These valleys are cut into dacite, called Kitagawa Dacite, and are covered by volcanic ash which originated in the Narugo Volcano, southwest of this region. In the upper horizon of this volcanic ash, humus accumulates thickly, forming the so-called "Kuroboku Soil". Soil profiles are almost the same at every point of the study area except for the depth of the humus horizon.

Monthly mean temperatures and precipitation are shown in Table 1. The duration of snow cover continues from November till April, and the NW-Monsoon is assumed to prevail in winter in general.

The potential natural vegetation (Tüxen 1956) is presumed to be *Fagus crenata* forest with *Sasa kurilensis* as an understory, but today there prevails a vast grassland of *Miscanthus sinensis* as a result of prolonged and repeated logging, burning and grazing which have been caused by the pasturage of horses and cattle.

Table 1 Monthly mean temperature and precipitation of Narugo, southwest of Kawatabi

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Ann.
Temp.	-0.1	0.2	3.7	10.7	15.6	19.5	23.1	24.9	21.0	15.3	9.1	2.3	12.1
Prec.	110.1	135.3	118.4	133.4	127.6	167.8	232.5	194.8	212.7	162.1	149.3	165.1	1973.2

III Methods of survey

Survey points (00,51,74 etc.) were selected for the convenience of the survey.

In order to survey vegetation, 1-meter quadrates were established among the survey points and the following values were measured in every quadrate²⁾: i) a coverage of each species in terms of Braun-Braquet's 5-grades, ii) the height (cm) and coverage (%) of every layer of communities and iii) the height of certain particular species, namely, *Miscanthus sinensis* and *Weigela hortensis*, and so on. Besides these, standing crops of whole plants, *Miscanthus sinensis* and *Weigela hortensis* in 1 m² were separately measured at certain optional points. In this paper, values of i) and ii) are mainly used to make a qualitative analysis.

The depth of the black, humified A-horizon of the soil was measured at every survey point, and at some points soil moisture (weight in %) was measured also. Several soil profiles were also observed.

The shapes of the snow cover in spring were observed and the snow depth was measured several times.

2) The quadrate No. 1 is, for example, that which is situated in the area which is surrounded by survey points Nos. 1, 11, 2 and 21. The quadrates with suffixes show that several quadrates were taken in those areas at the same time.

IV Classification of plant communities

Physiognomically the vegetation of the present study area is classified as follows: communities with abundant *Weigela hortensis* (on the NE-facing slope), grassland of *Miscanthus sinensis* (on the flat area of the valley floor of the highest section, on the S-facing slope of the valley side and on the lower part of the valley floor of the second section), and, a tall herb community or Altherbosa (in the valley head of the second section).

Suganuma and Sugawara (1968) have already classified the plant communities of *Miscanthus* grassland phytosociologically in a valley near the present study area. In the present paper, the writer attempts to classify the communities on the basis of the foregoing classification, and in doing so, certain differences were noted.

From the present study, plant communities are classified as in Table 2, and situated as in Fig. 3. Table 3 is an association table of the communities.

Table 2 Classification of communities

-
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. | Astilbo-Miscantetum sinensis |
| 1-a. | Subass. of <i>Petasites japonicus</i> var. <i>giganteus</i> |
| 1-a ₁ . | Typical variant |
| 1-a ₂ . | Variant of <i>Clinopodium multicaule</i> |
| 1-b. | Subass. of <i>Haloragis micrantha</i> |
| 1-b ₁ . | Typical variant |
| 1-b ₂ . | Variant of <i>Metanartheceum leuto-viride</i> |
| 1-c. | Facies of <i>Astilbe Thumbergii</i> var. <i>congesta</i> |
| 2. | Hydrangeo-Cacalietum hastatae var. <i>orientalis</i> |
-

Whole plant communities are included in *Miscanthion sinensis* and are classified as follows:

1. Ass. Astilbo-Miscantheum sinensis Suganuma et Sugawara 1968

This association is the so-called *Miscanthus* grassland which occupies the greater part of the upland of the Kawatabi Experimental Farm, including the present study area. This is further classified as follows:

1-a. Subass. of *Petasites japonicus* var. *giganteus* Suganuma et Sugawara 1968

This subassociation is situated on the valley side. Component species are fairly numerous (22–39 species) and rich in rather hygrophytic plants namely *Petasites japonicus* var. *giganteus*, *Aruncus sylvestris*, *Viola Faurieana*, and so on.

As mentioned above, *Weigela hortensis* grows richly and forms a *Weigela* bush in physiognomy, especially on the NE-facing valley side of the areas occupied by this association.

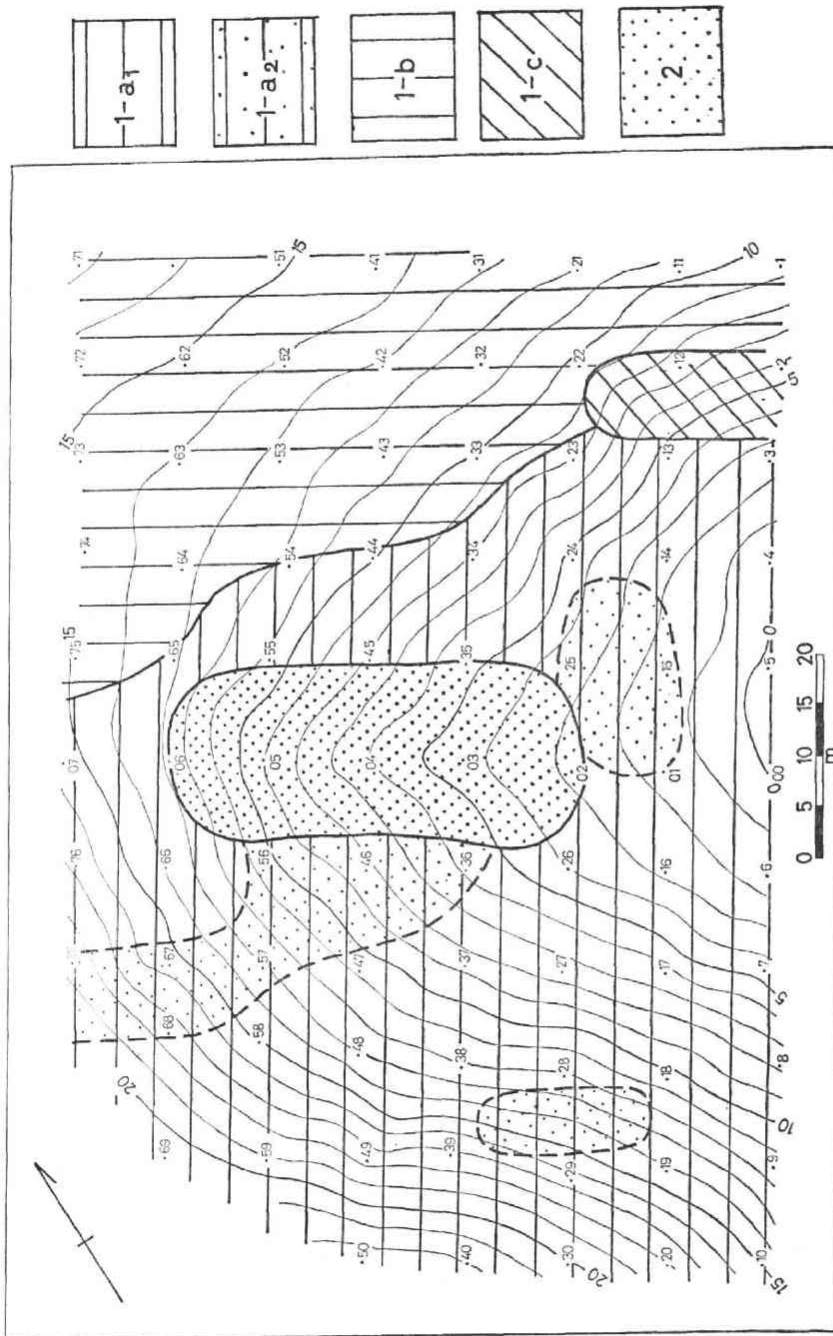


Fig. 3 Vegetation map
 1-a₁: typical variant of the subass. of *Petasites*
 1-a₂: variant of *Clinopodium*
 1-b: subass. of *Halovagis*
 1-c: facies of *Astilbe*
 2: Hydrangeo-Cacalietum (see Table 2) Interval of contours is 1m.

Weigela hortensis, however, is commonly found also at other sites, as shown in Table 3. Therefore it cannot be a differential species of this subassociation.

The typical variant (1-a₁) (Suganuma et Sugawara 1968) and the variant of *Clinopodium multicaule* (1-a₂) (new tentative name) belong to this subassociation. As many species are found both in the latter and in Hydrangeo-Cacalietum *hastata* var. *orientalis*, which is described below, this variant can be presumed as a transitional community between this subassociation and Hydrangeo-Cacalietum, or a mantle community of the latter. Between this variant and the variant of *Cacalia hastata* var. *orientalis* (Suganuma et Sugawara 1968) so many common species are found that they are assumed to be equal. However, in the present study area, *Clinopodium multicaule*, *Vitis Coignetiae*, and so on, are more frequent, so the writer gives a new tentative name to this community.

1-b. Subass. of *Haloragis micrantha* (new tentative name)

This subassociation is found on the upper flat area (valley floor of the highest valley), and seems to be more xerophytic than the last subassociation. The frequency of *Swertia japonica*, *Salix vulpina* and such are high in this subassociation, along with *Haloragis micrantha*. Component species of this subassociation are few in number in comparison with 1-a (16-22 species).

This subassociation is classified into the typical variant (1-b₁) (new tentative name) and the variant of *Metanartheceum luteo-viride* (1-b₂) (new tentative name).

1-b₂. Variant of *Metanartheceum luteo-viride* (new tentative name)

The subassociation of *Haloragis micrantha* is correlated with the subassociation of *Metanartheceum luteo-viride* (Suganuma et Sugawara 1968), but in the present study area the locality in which *Metanartheceum luteo-viride*, *Lespedeza cuneata* and *Epipactis Thumbergii* are found, and those without them, are clearly distinguished. For this reason the present writer has classified these two variants in terms of these species, as one possibility.

As these two variants are, however, found in rather closed localities and the typical variant is relatively small in the number of localities, these are drawn on the vegetational map (Fig. 3) under the designation of the subassociation of *Haloragis micrantha* (1-b). Because of these conditions, it may be more reasonable that this subassociation is not classified into two variants as described by Suganuma and Sugawara (1968).

1-c. Facies of *Astilbe Thumbergii* var. *congesta* (new tentative name)

Another type of community, in which almost none of the differential species of the previous two subassociations are found, belongs to Astilbo-Miscantheum *sinensis*. Since component species of this type are rather few in number in comparison with the previous two subassociation, and ♂ verage of *Astilbe Thumbergii* var.

congesta is comparatively high, the writer has given it this name. As the locality of this facies lies between these two subassociations, it is possible that this facies is a typical subassociation of *Astilbo-Miscanthetum sinensis*.

2. Ass. *Hydrangeo-cacaleitum hastatae* var. *orientalis* (new tentative name)

This association is found in the concave valley head and there grow *Cacalia hastata* var. *orientalis*, *Angelica ursina* and other tall herbs, shrubs mainly *Hydrangea macrophylla* var. *megacarpa* and subarboric trees such as *Acer palmatum* var. *Matsumurae*, and *A. nomo*. Lianas like *Vitis Coignetiae*, *Akebia trifoliata* are also abundant. Component species of this association are fairly numerous (30–34 species).

This type of vegetation was precisely studied by Sugawara (1967). In such communities, *Altherbosa*, is found in the Kawatabi Experimental Farm everywhere in valley head, forming a remarkable landscape with arboric or subarboric trees such as *Acer*.

In this association a coverage of *Angelica ursina* is very profuse in certain places, and when this occurs facies of *Angelica ursina* are possible.

V Correlations of the situation of plant communities with other physical factors of the landscape

Correlation with landforms

A morphological map is shown in Fig. 4. This map shows the subdivisions of the landforms, which are divided by the breaks in dip angles.³⁾ According to this map, the present study area can be broadly divided into three parts: (A) the flat part of the valley floor in the middle of the area, (B) the valley sides surrounding the last part and (C) a flat part above these. The upper flat part (C) is the valley floor of the upper (highest) section (Fig. 2-X). The valley sides (b_1), connected to the uppermost portion of the valley floor (A), can be an extension of the valley floor (A). The valley head of the lower (third) section (D) (Fig. 2-Z) cuts into the bottom of this area.

From this map, compared to Fig. 3, it is remarkable that there is such a close correlation of landforms with vegetation.

That is, the locality of *Hydrangeo-Cacalietum* is limited to the valley floor (A) and to its extension (b_1), and that of the subassociation of *Haloragis* of *Astilbo-Miscanthetum* to the upper flat portion (C). On the contrary, the subassociation of *Petasites* is situated mainly on the valley side (B). The last subassociation is

3) As to the methods of this map see Savigear (1965), Tamura (1969) and so on.

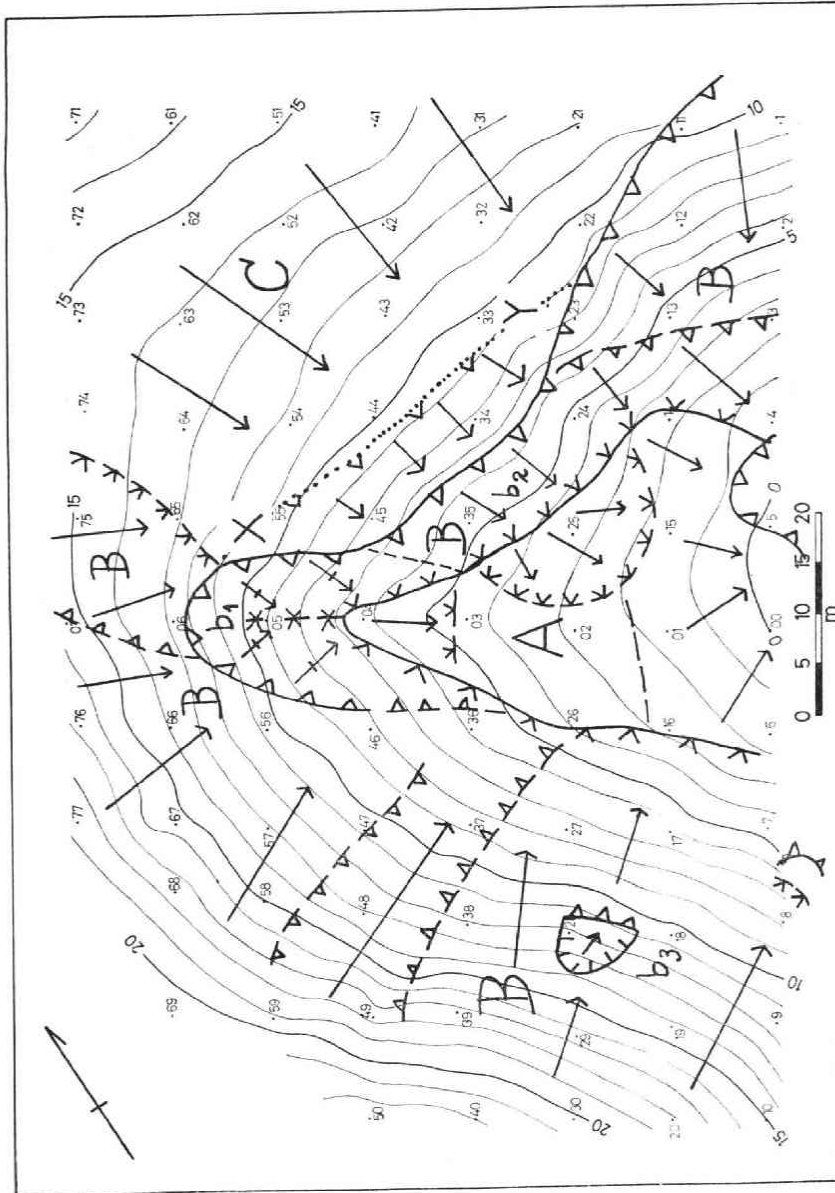


Fig. 4-a Morphological map

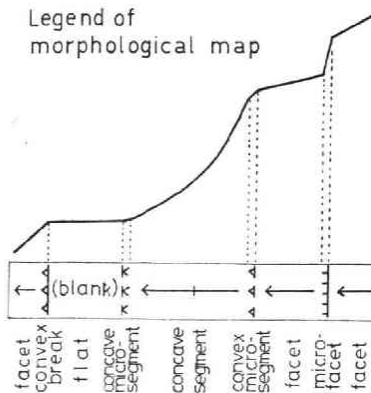


Fig. 4-b

also found on the lower portion on the valley floor and on the upper flat portion. Between these two exceptional locations of this subassociation, however, that of the valley floor, when it is regarded as a transitional part to the valley head of the lower section (D), tends to have the character of the valley side. And the locality of this subassociation on the upper flat portion can also be regarded as a part of valley side, because, judging from contours, it is possible that one break (dotted line X-Y in Fig. 4) is overlooked.

Moreover, attention must be paid to the fact that on the valley side, shown in the left part of Fig. 4, the boundary between the typical variant and the variant of *Clinopodium* of the subassociation of *Petasites*, well agrees with a small break near the points 36, 47 and 58.

Correlation with soil moisture

Following a discussion of the correlation between vegetation and landform, the writer will describe the relationship between the vegetation and other physical factors. Comparing the subassociation of *Petasites* with that of *Haloragis*, the former can be assumed to be more hygrophytic than the latter. From this point of view and judging only from the effect of insolation on soil moisture, the fact that the former is situated on the NE-facing valley side and the latter on the slightly inclined, S-facing flat area, can be easily understood. But that the subassociation of *Petasites* is situated also on the S-facing valley side (b_2), cannot be understood only in terms of the relation between the degrees of insolation and soil moisture. In order to solve this problem, the distribution of soil moisture in the present study area was measured (Fig. 5).⁴⁾

This map shows, of course, the distribution of soil moisture only relatively, because these values are only the raw percentages of soil water related to dried soil (under 110°C). Moreover, it would be an exaggeration to decide the areal zonation of plant communities as a critical value from these figures. However, we can roughly assimilate the hydrological condition of the area from this map.

4) Here the result of only one day is represented. As other data show almost equal distribution of soil moisture, this map represents the average condition.

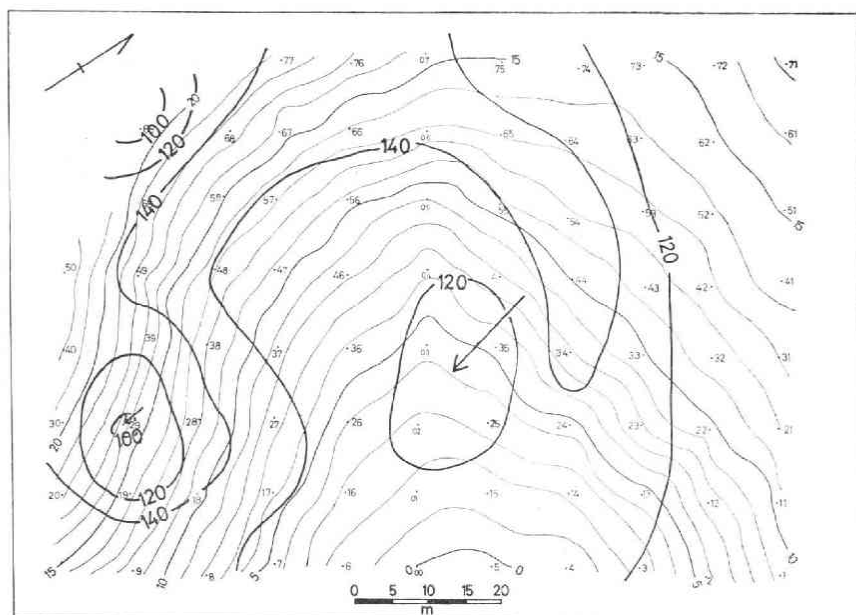


Fig. 5 Soil moisture at a depth of 20 cm from the surface (weight %, 21. July, 1966)

From this figure, the present study area is clearly divided into two parts. Namely, the upper flat portion with lower soil moisture, and the valley side and valley floor with higher soil moisture.

More attention must be paid to the fact that surrounding the valley floor there also extends an area with high soil moisture ligulating into the S-facing valley side. According to this, the valley side offers an equal condition from the standpoint of soil moisture, whichever direction it faces.

This phenomenon can be the reason why the rather hygrophytic subassociation of *Petasites* is situated on the S-facing slope of valley side (b_2).

However, the problem still remains as to why the valley side slope has an equally high soil moisture content whichever direction it faces.

Hydrangeo-Cacalietum, which forms *Altherbosa*, is generally expected to be found in the most humid areas⁵⁾. From Fig. 5, however, this is not always the case. Except for the area surrounding point 06, the soil moisture of this location is rather low compared to the surrounding valley slope, and in the area near points 02, 03, 25 and 35, soil moisture is as low as in the upper flat portion (A). This tendency is the same earlier in the season. Therefore, other factors correlated with the location of this association must be further discussed.

5) For example Yoshioka (1948).

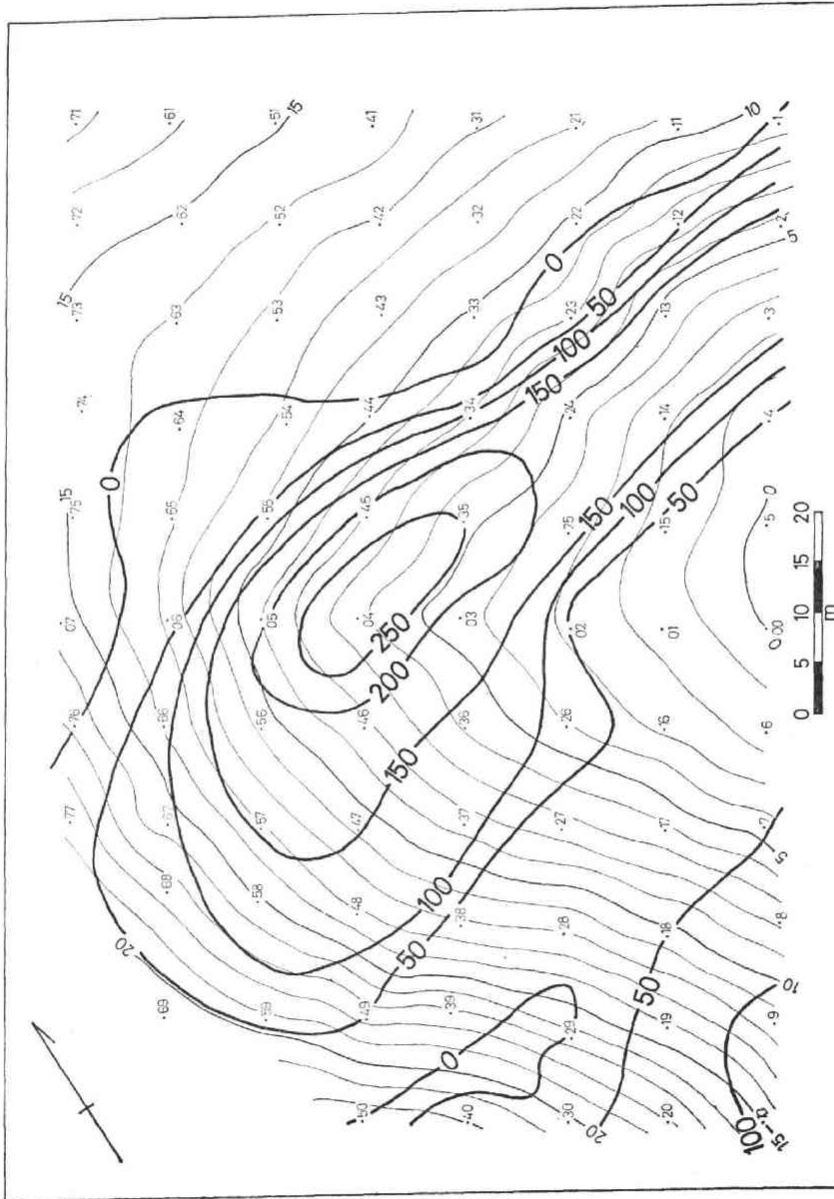


Fig. 6 Depth of snow cover (cm, 10. Mar., 1966)

Correlation with snowcover

The location of Hydrangeo-Cacalietum is found in the area with the highest snow depth, as Sugawara (1967) has already reported (Figs. 3 and 6). Since in winter the NW-Monsoon is assumed to prevail in this region, this situation can also be likened to that of a piled snowdrift on the leese side of the Monsoon.

It has been often reported that tall herb communities or Altherbosa, develop around snow patches⁶⁾. But it is also reported that these are situated in a position surrounding the snow patches mainly near their lower end and not directly beneath the patches.

Positions near the under side of a snow patch are irrigated by meltwater from it, and this sort of water fosters the development of tall herb communities. In fact, in the present study area also, soil moisture is much higher near the snowdrift than in other places when the snow cover remains. Thus in such a case, the distribution of soil moisture shows a reverse pattern to that shown in Fig. 3, and the heights of *Miscanthus sinensis* and so on, are extraordinary here. However, since snow has already melted in the highest growing season for tall herbs (i.e. in May), the tall herb community, which occupies a position just beneath the snow patch, cannot be irrigated by meltwater fully or only for a very short period, if at all.

The first favorable effect of long-continued snow cover is that there is protection from frost damage. According to the investigation of Midorikawa et al. (1964) in Kirigamine, *Sasa*-type vegetation is found in an area where snow accumulates to less than 1 m in depth in February, and there is a depth of frost penetration of more than 10 cm. On the contrary, tall herb community and *Miscanthus* are distributed in sites, where soils are protected against freezing under snowdrifts more than 1 m in depth.

In the present study area, *Sasa* is found only exceptionally⁷⁾. However, it is remarkable that the boundary between the subassociation of *Haloragis* and that of *Patasites* well agrees with the boundary between the upper flat portion (C), where snow melts early, and the valley side (B) with later snow melting. And the fact that the location of Hydrangeo-Cacalietum is equal to the area with the highest snow depth, suggests that this community is so located because the lower degree of damage caused by frost in the growing season.

As to the correlation between the locality of Hydrangeo-Cacalietum and the snow cover, the influence of burning must also be discussed. In this region burning

6) For example, Sugawara (1967), Ishizuka (1948), Yoshioka (1948) and Suzuki (1966). Billings and Bliss (1959) reported that the productivity of vegetation is remarkably high near the end of the snow patch and called this area the "wet meadow".

7) Also in this study area snow melts early in the season near points 1, 9 and 21 where the coverage of *Sasa* is high (Table 2).

carried out in spring in order to retain the *Miscanthus* grassland. It is accomplished in a season when snow still remains, so as to prevent forest fires. So the location of this association, where snow remains till late, is not influenced by fire. This is also one of the important reasons for the existence here of this association.

It is also presumed that in this portion many tree species grow, (i.e. *Acer palmatum* var. *Matsumurae*, *A. mono*) forming a kind of subarboric forest as a result of these conditions.

Correlation with depth of the A-horizon of soil

According to Midorikawa et al. (1964), the thickest humified A-horizon is found in Kirigamine in the vicinity of tall herb communities.

Also in the present study area, the black humid A-horizon is situated most deeply near this sort of community (Fig. 7). As a whole, however, the distribution of the depth of the A-horizon and that of these communities does not always have a positive correlation.

It is remarkable that the boundary between the location of the subassociation of *Haloragis* and that of *Petasites* (Fig. 3) and that between the upper flat portion (C) and the valley side (B) (Fig. 4), well agrees with the isopleth showing a depth of 60 cm of the A-horizon.

This phenomenon can probably be a key in solving the problem of why soil moisture is fairly high in this situation. That is, the water percolated from the upper flat portion (C) is introduced here by interflow and renders soil moisture high. Also, since this slope faces south, water is transferred through evapotranspiration into the air and no longer descends. For this reason, soil moisture is higher here than in the valley floor, and the microscopic particles of humus, which are brought by interflow water, accumulate here and thicken the A-horizon. However, this explanation is, of course, only a possible hypothesis, and further investigation is necessary.

The depth of the A-horizon of the soil of the valley floor and of the NE-facing slope of valley side (b_3) is as thin as that of the location of the subassociation of *Haloragis*. Therefore, a direct correlation between the locations of communities and their environment should not be claimed even if there are many important indirect correlations.

Thus far, the situations of plant communities in relation to landforms, soil moisture, snowcover and the depth of the A-horizon, have been discussed, and it has been described that there are fairly close correlations among these.

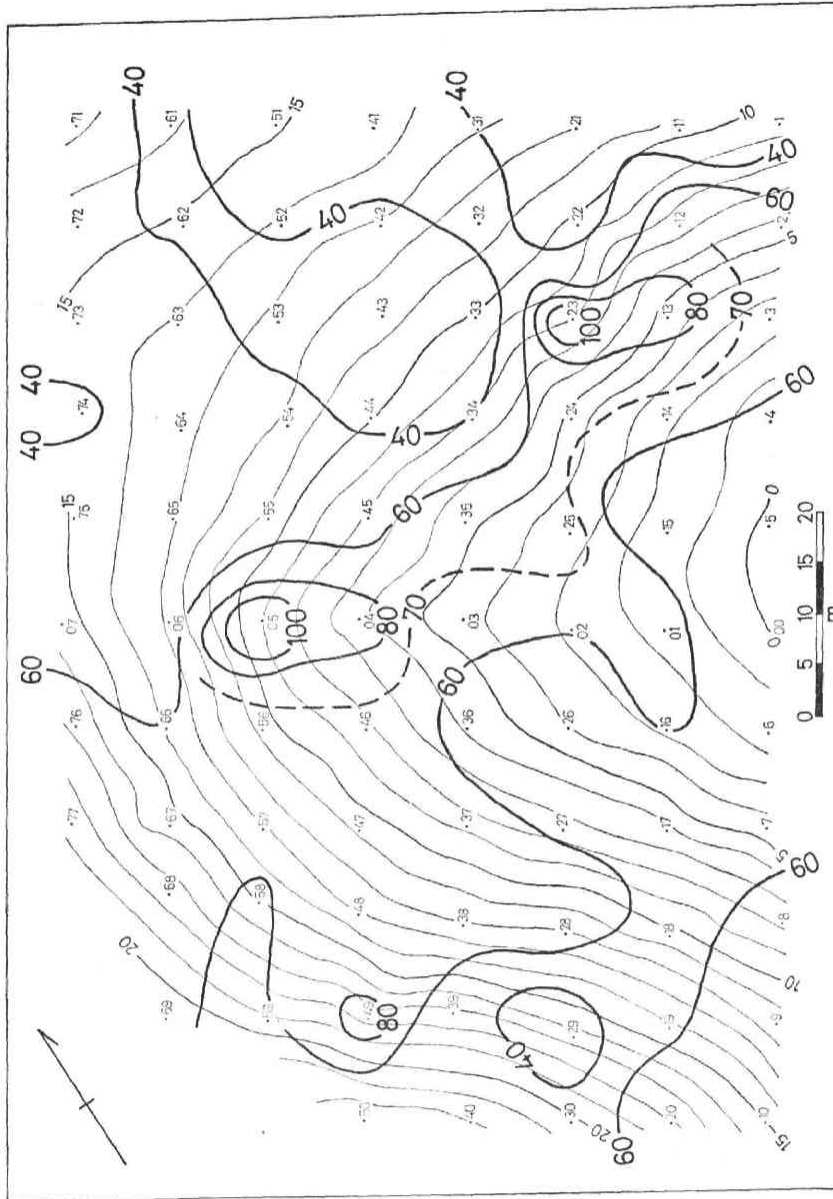


Fig. 7 Depth of A-horizon (cm)

VI Conclusion and summary

A detailed classification of plant communities in a part of one valley in the undulating upland of Kawatabi, in terms of phytosociological methods, was conducted, and correlations with the physical conditions of their environments were investigated in as much detail as possible.

As a result, it has been clarified that the situation of each community can be explained in terms of relations between their ecological character and land forms, soil moisture, snow cover and the depth of the A-horizon (or a complex of these).

The particular results, which are known through this investigation, are as follows:

1. The vegetation of the present study area is phytosociologically classified as in Table 2.

2. From the standpoint of landforms; the Hydrangeo-Cacalietum is located on the valley floor near the valley head and on a part of the valley side upward of the former; the subassociation of *Petasites* is on the valley side and the subassociation of *Haloragis* is on the upper flat portion (the valley floor of the higher section).

3. The boundary between the subassociation of *Petasites* and that of *Haloragis* is well correlated with soil moisture and the time of snow melting, and the former subassociation is located in an area where soil moisture is high and where snow melts in a later season. This is caused by the humid edaphological environment and the small frost damage of this location.

4. The location of Hydrangeo-Cacalietum is not so humid as is generally thought, and is rather lower in soil moisture than that of the subassociation of *Petasites*. In this location, however, snow accumulates very deeply and melts especially late in the season. This suggests, that such a location is influenced neither by frost nor by fire.

5. The S-facing valley side has high soil moisture despite its orientation. It is possible that this location is irrigated by interflow water, since there is found a thick accumulation of humus. And it is also remarkable, that also there is much snow accumulation.

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