

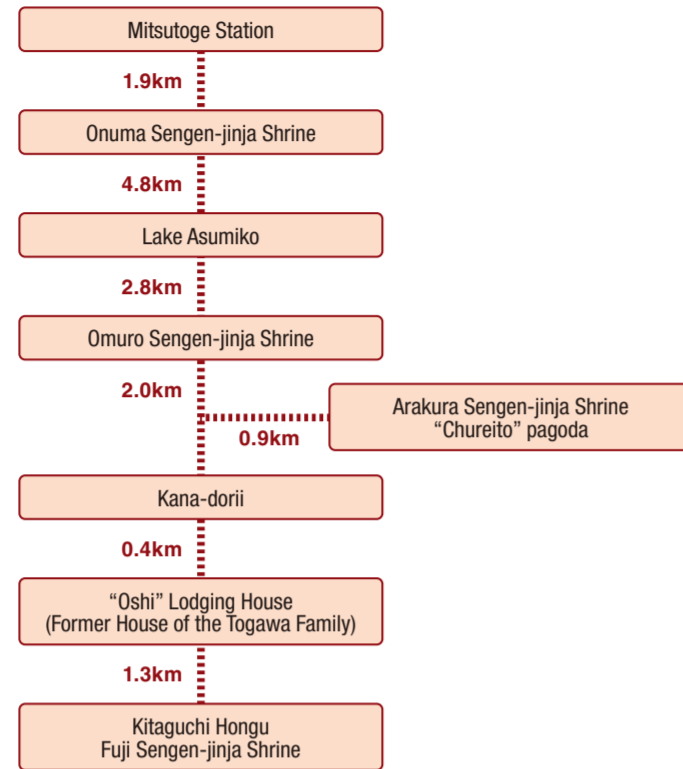
ANCIENT ROAD TO FUJISAN

— Pilgrimage Routes of Fujisan —

Fujisan-michi Road

Koshu-dochu road was one of the highways starting from Nihonbashi in Edo (present-day Tokyo). People living in the Kanto plains walked along Koshu-dochu road to the west, heading for Fujisan. The road forked at Otsuki post-town and they walked up Yamura-ji road along the Katsura River to come to Yoshida. The Fujisan worshippers named the whole road from Edo "Fujisan-michi".

Walk on Fujisan-michi Road !



Gazing at Mt. Fuji from Inume Pass in Uenohara City

Onuma (Milestone / Wade-miya)

It was around the present-day Onuma area in Nishikatsura Town that people coming along Fujisan-michi could get a chance for the first time to see the whole mountain of Fujisan trailing gently in a conic shape. The old road at Onuma was called "Shuku-dori", which flourished as a post-town for worship-ascenders to the summer mountain during the period from the Edo era through the present days.

It is said that Onuma Sengen-jinja Shrine was founded in 721. The deities enshrined are Konohana-Sakuya Hime, the goddess of Fujisan, and her husband, Amatsuhikohikohononinigi no Mikoto.



Onuma Sengen-jinja Shrine

Kamikurechi (Ken-marubi Lava)

The volcanic alluvial fan spreads out on the northern side of Fujisan, on which there are many streams of lava flow. This area had big volcanic activities repeatedly. The new lava of the Shin-Fuji Kazan (Young Fuji Volcano) are called "___ marubi".

Ken-marubi lava that flowed out near the summit about 1000 years ago went down around the Komitake Kazan (Komitake Volcano) along the present Fuji Subaru Line Toll Road, which formed Yoshida and Funatsu lava tree molds, and finally reached around Shiraito in Kamikurechi. It is said that it was named "Ken-marubi" because the shape of the lava flow resembled a sword, which is called "ken" in Japanese.

Koasumi (Lake Asumiko)

Lake Asumiko is a small lake, but it is one of eight lakes called "Uchihakkei", which were regarded as the pilgrimage destinations. It was drawn as "Fuji seen from Asumi Village" in "Fugaku Hyakkei", or one hundred landscapes of Fujisan, by Katsushika Hokusai. Lake Asumiko was part of Koasumi Village in the Edo period, and the people aiming for Fujisan would perform water rituals here. They purified themselves with abundant water sprung out at the foot of the surrounding mountains, and then set out to ascend Fujisan.



Lake Asumiko

Arakura Sengen-jinja Shrine

Sengen-jinja Shrine on the hill of Arakura is located at the point where it overlooks the Ken-marubi lava. It can be inferred that a ritual would be held, praying to quell the lava flow and to protect people from disaster. Today it is getting popular as a viewpoint of Fujisan which is known for "Chureito", five-storied pagoda.



"Chureito" pagoda



"Sangoku-Daichi-zan" tablet

The tablet which reads "Sangoku-Daichi-zan" is put up on the torii at Arakura Sengen-jinja Shrine. Sangoku, meaning three countries, indicates India, China, and Japan, which signified the whole world in the Medieval period. That is to say "Sangoku-Daichi-zan" meant the No. 1 mountain in the world.

Shimoyoshida / Omuro Sengen-jinja Shrine

Silk fabrics have been one of the major industries in Shimoyoshida since the Edo period. People have reared silkworms to reel silk off cocoons and made silk fabrics. The industry has been supported by the abundant subsoil water from Fujisan. It has grown in affluence, making the best use of the natural condition, for example, the water from different sources was used for dyeing as necessary. The wholesale stores of silk fabrics used to stand in a row on the east side of the main street, which were called "Kinuya-machi", or the town of silk fabrics stores.

At Omuro Sengen-jinja Shrine in Shimoyoshida, a Shinto ritual called "Tsutsu-gayu" is conducted from the midnight of January 14th through the dawn of the following 15th. It is a divine fortune-telling, in which how much porridge and how many grains of rice come in the 24 pipes of reed tell us how the crop will be in the year. This Shinto ritual also tells us whether the number of climbers to Fujisan is large or small. It was a matter of concern for Oshi because their lives were influenced by it.



"Yabusame" ritual at Omuro Sengen-jinja Shrine

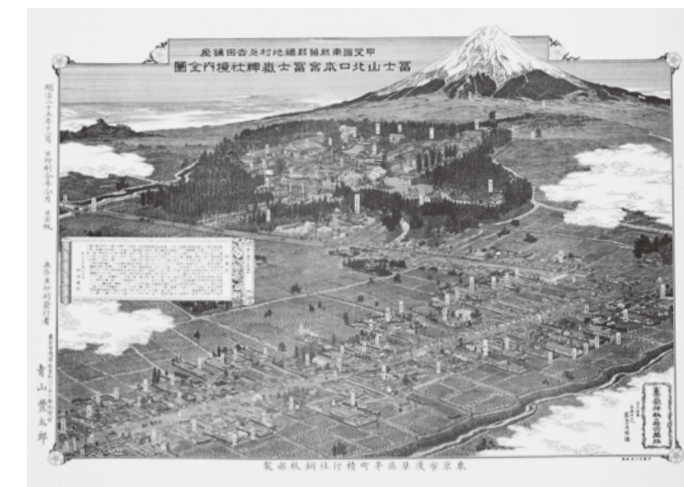
Kana-dorii

Torii gates usually signify the boundaries between the common world and the sacred area. Kana-dorii standing at the gateway of Yoshida Town is regarded as the first torii, and the town was formed with the religious design as if the inner side of the torii would be the sacred area as well. At the important points along the route to the summit, there are torii gates, and Kana-dorii is the first one.



"Kana-dorii" gate

Oshi-machi (the base town for worship-ascend)



"Oshi-machi" map

In the Edo period, there were so many Fuji-ko (Fuji pilgrimage associations) that it was said there were 808 Fuji-ko groups in Edo. They came to Yoshida walking through the Fujisan-michi from various places. When the Fuji-ko were at the height of popularity among the commoners, nearly 100 Oshi-lodgings and related houses lined the road. Yoshida developed into the base town for worship-ascend to Fujisan.

Fuji-ko which were popular in Edo and the surrounding areas made worship-ascend in a group. Oshi accommodated the Fuji-ko in their private houses, while they preached the Fujisan belief. During the mountain climbing season, Oshi took care of Fuji-ko groups who stayed in their lodging houses, serving the meals, praying for purification, and guiding the climbing.



Oshi Lodging House (former House of the Togawa Family)

Mt. Fuji from Fuji Hokuroku Area



Mt. Fuji from Mt. Takazasu



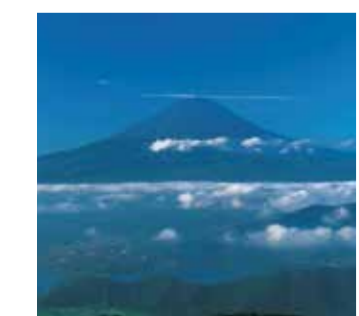
Mt. Fuji from Mt. Ishiwari



Mt. Fuji from Nijumagari Pass



Mt. Fuji from Mt. Mitsutoge



Mt. Fuji from Shindo Pass



Mt. Fuji from Mt. Odake

Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine

Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine was the starting point of worship-ascend for Fuji-ko. It originated in the place for worship from afar ("Yohai") where Asama no Okami was enshrined. In 1480, the torii gate was built. The most of the shrine buildings were completed by the middle of the 17th century including the main shrine which was built in 1615. This shrine has been deeply connected with Fuji-ko, and the buildings were restored with the donation by the leader of Fuji-ko, Murakami Kosei, in the 1730's. Thus the present landscape was formed.



The main building of Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine

The tablet on the top of the large torii gate in the precinct reads "Sangoku-Daichi-zan," meaning that Fujisan is the No.1 mountain among the three countries like India, China and Japan. People considered Fujisan itself as the object of worship. Fuji pilgrims passed through the gate and started to make a worship-ascend. It is one of the largest wooden torii gates in Japan.

Fuji pilgrims conducted rituals to make a worship-ascend in a formalized manner inside the precinct and started their journey to the summit of Fujisan at "Tozan-mon" (the climbing gate) located at the rear of the shrine buildings. Numerous worshippers visited this place and climbed Fujisan during the summer season.



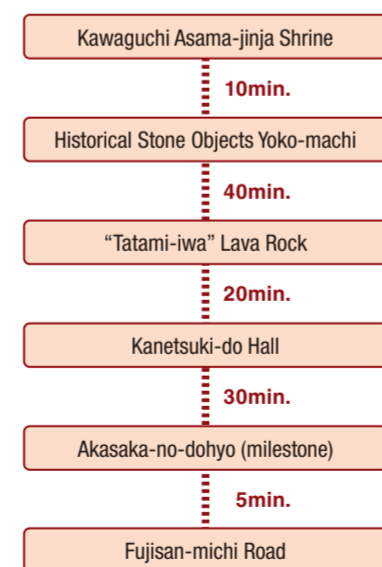
"Tozan-mon" (the climbing gate)

Kamakura-kaido Road

There is a road called "Kai-ji", which branches off from the historical main road in Japan, Tokai-do Road and leads to the capital of "Kai Province" (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). It was also called "Misaka-ji" because it crosses "Misaka-toge" Pass. In the Kamakura period (1185-1333), it came to be called Kamakura-kaido Road since samurai warriors used almost the same route to pay a courtesy visit to the Kamakura Shogunate.

From the Muromachi period (1333-1568) onward, a lot of believers of the general population visited Fujisan and the people from the westward and northward areas from Kofu Basin used Kamakura-kaido Road as a pilgrimage route to Fujisan. At that time, "Oshi" lodging houses to accommodate those believers were built in the Kawaguchi area which was located along the road and they had flourished up to the Edo period (1603-1868).

Walk on Kamakura-kaido Road !



View from the vicinity of Tenkachaya Teahouse

Kawaguchi Asama-jinja Shrine

It is believed that the shrine was originally built in order to appease the deity and implore protection against eruptions after Fujisan erupted in 864. Since the Medieval period, it has supported Fujisan worship as the shrine which is sited in the center of the settlement of "Oshi" religious guides' lodgings, where believers coming to Fujisan via Kamakura-kaido Road stayed. Religious events closely related to Fujisan are still conducted today. One of them is Chigomai dance, which is designated as an important intangible cultural property.



The approach to Kawaguchi Asama-jinja Shrine

Chigomai dance

Chigomai dance is one of the Shinto ritual performing arts which have been passed down in Kawaguchi Asama-jinja Shrine. It has been dedicated to the deities of the shrine at the annual festivals, "Magomi (visiting a grandchild)" Festival held on April 25th and "Daidai Okagura (Shinto music and dance)" Festival held on July 28th. Chigomai dance is thought to have been influenced by "Miko-no-mai" dance which was dedicated by "Oshi" religious guides in the Kawaguchi area in the Edo period. It is local girls in the Kawaguchi area that play the role of dancers.



"Oshi" religious guides in the Kawaguchi area

A large following of "Oshi" religious guides in the Kawaguchi area was based in Kofu Basin and the northward and westward areas from Kofu Basin. It supported Fujisan Worship in the Nagano and the Northern Kanto Regions. Twelve "Oshi" called Kawaguchi Juni-Bou lived in the early Edo period, increasing their branch families. An old document says that there were more than 120 "Oshi" at peak.



Oshi Lodging House (house of the Umitsuri-Honjo Family)

"Tatami-iwa" Lava Rock at Funatsu-hama shore of Lake Kawaguchiko

It is thought that "Tatami-iwa" lava rock found at Funatsu-hama shore of Lake Kawaguchiko was the volcanic feature created by lava flow after Fujisan's eruptions in the middle of the Jomon period, around 4500 years ago. It is presumed that this spot was regarded as one of the places for the "Uchihakkei-meguri," the practice of making a circuit of eight lakes at the base of Fujisan, which was conducted by Fuji-ko in the Edo period.



"Tatami-iwa" lava rock

Mt. Tenjo-yama and Kanetsuki-do or the bellhouse

Kamakura-kaido Road was an important military road for Kai-no-kuni (Yamanashi Prefecture) in the Warring States period (1467-1600). Along the road, there are ruins of different castles constructed to prepare for the enemy invasion. It is said that there was a fire beacon platform site in Mt. Tenjo-yama. Also, at the foot of the mountain, there used to be Kanetsuki-do or the bellhouse in case of emergency.



"Kanetsuki-do" bellhouse

"Gyoi", or a pilgrim's garb

The summit of Fujisan was compared to a Buddhist paradise or the afterworld by the people who climbed the mountain for a religious purpose. Ascending Fujisan meant a religious practice and having an experience of symbolic death. Descending the mountain signified a spiritual rebirth. Therefore, pilgrims wore white "Gyoi" clothes which were the same religious white clothes used to dress the deceased.



"Goshuin", or a seal stamp given to visitors to Shinto shrines

"Goshuin" is testimony of "Omairi", which means visiting shrines, making a connection with deities and deepening the relationship with them. In short, "Goshuin" is testimony of building the connection with deities.



The first non-Japanese to climb Fujisan

The first non-Japanese to climb Fujisan was Rutherford Alcock, who was the first British diplomatic minister in Japan in the late Edo period, when the Tokugawa Shogunate governed Japan. Shortly after opening the country to the world, in 1860, as the movement to oust foreigners was gathering momentum, Alcock's climbing party with nine members was pompously accompanied by over 100 bodyguards.

In those days, women were still prohibited from entering Fujisan. However, a British diplomatic minister in Japan, Harry Parkes's wife, Fanny Parkes became known as the first non-Japanese woman to climb Fujisan. That was in 1867, seven years after the first ascent of Fujisan by Alcock as a foreigner. At that time, the Tokugawa Shogunate came to the end and Japan was entering a new era with the Meiji Restoration.

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