

# ANCIENT ROAD TO FUJISAN

— Mt. Fuji Worship and “Fuji-ko” (Fuji pilgrim association) —



## World Heritage Site Fujisan

Fujisan, a symbol of Japan was registered as a World Heritage Site in June 2013. Fujisan, which has been worshipped as an object of religious faith by the people of Japan since ancient times and gave birth to numerous artworks, is composed of 25 component parts and constituent elements such as the mountain area in which including ascending routes, and Sengen-jinja shrines and lakes at the foot of the mountain. The roads which connect these scattered component parts and people took to worship Fujisan from ancient times are so-called pilgrimage routes.



Sunrise from Mt. Fuji



Aerial photo of Fujisan

List of Component parts and Constituent elements			
1	Fujisan Mountain Area	9	“Oshi” Lodging House (former House of the Togawa Family)
1-1	Mountaintop worship sites	10	“Oshi” Lodging House (House of the Osano Family)
1-2	Oniya-Murayama Ascending Route (present Fujinomiya Ascending Route)	11	Lake Yamanakako
1-3	Suyama Ascending Route (present Gotenba Ascending Route)	12	Lake Kawaguchiko
1-4	Subashiri Ascending Route	13	Oshino Hakkai springs (Deguchiike Pond)
1-5	Yoshida Ascending Route	14	Oshino Hakkai springs (Okamaike Pond)
1-6	Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine	15	Oshino Hakkai springs (Sokonashiike Pond)
1-7	Lake Saiko	16	Oshino Hakkai springs (Choshiike Pond)
1-8	Lake Shojiko	17	Oshino Hakkai springs (Wakuike Pond)
1-9	Lake Motosuko	18	Oshino Hakkai springs (Nigorike Pond)
2	Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha Shrine	19	Oshino Hakkai springs (Kagamiike Pond)
3	Yamamiya Sengen-jinja Shrine	20	Oshino Hakkai springs (Shobuike Pond)
4	Murayama Sengen-jinja Shrine	21	Funatsu lava tree molds
5	Suyama Sengen-jinja Shrine	22	Yoshida lava tree molds
6	Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine (Subashiri Sengen-jinja Shrine)	23	Hitoana Fuji-ko Iseki
7	Kawaguchi Asama-jinja Shrine	24	Shiraito no Taki waterfalls
8	Fuji Omuro Sengen-jinja Shrine	25	Mihonomatsubara pine tree grove

## 1. Nature of Fujisan

### Fujisan of Four-story structure

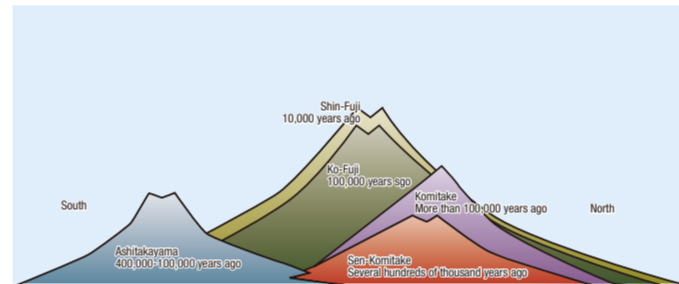
Fujisan is considered to be a stratovolcano built up of 4 different volcanoes.

Chronologically, first the Sen-Komitake volcano emerged on the northern side of the present Fujisan. Then, the Komitake volcano overlapped with it. Furthermore the Ko-Fuji volcano began volcanic activities around 100 thousand years ago, while it continued to grow until it had covered Komitake by repeating explosive eruptions from the top, it also caused sector collapses. Such eruption and collapse repeatedly occurred until 20 thousand years ago.

The Shin-Fuji volcano that began volcanic activity around 10 thousand years ago first formed a vast mountain foot by ejecting a huge amount of low viscosity basaltic lava flow. It is believed that the subsequently repeated eruptions led to forming a beautiful cone shaped stratovolcano.

It enabled Fujisan to become an unusually high and beautiful figure as an independent peak that various factors such as lying at a unique geological location on the earth where three tectonic plates (the Eurasian Plate, the North American Plate and the Philippine Sea Plate) overlap, being a four-story structured volcano, being composed of runny basaltic lava, and so forth, miraculously converge.

As for Fujisan’s volcanic activity, the eruption of 10 several times has been recorded only with letter documents. The eruptions in 800, 864 and 1707 are called the three biggest eruptions.



Structure of Fujisan

### Birth of the Fuji Five Lakes and “Aokigabara Jukai” Forest

The three lakes of Motosuko, Shojiko and Saiko are considered to have been once a huge lake surrounding the northern side of Fujisan called Lake Ko-Senoumi long ago as the water levels of those three lakes are of the same height. Old Lake Kawaguchiko existed in its east. The Oshino Hakkai springs are considered to be the remains of dried up Lake Oshino. These lakes and springs were formed in such way that the lava from volcanic eruptions dammed subsoil water of Fujisan and inland water from surrounding mountains.

Lake Kawaguchiko became the current shape by a flow down of Funatsu lava that covered the Funatsu-hama remains where relics of the early Jomon period (B.C 131-4 centuries) are found, and dammed its southern coast. Lava flowed into Lake Ko-Senoumi and divided it into Lake Motosuko and Lake Senoumi. Then, a



Lake Yamanakako



Lake Kawaguchiko



Lake Saiko

huge amount of Aokigahara lava from the subsequent big Jogan eruption in 864 flowed into Lake Senoumi at the northwestern foot of Fujisan to bury most part of the lake, which resulted in making Lake Saiko and Lake Shojiko appear in the remained area. Taka-marubi lava flow that is said to have subsequently flowed out dammed the upper stream of Katsura river, and as a result, formed Lake Yamanakako. The present shape of the Fuji Five Lakes reflects volcanic activities of Fujisan.

A primeval forest formed on top of the lava plateau roughly 30 square kilometers wide that had been formed by the Jogan big eruption in 864, is the Aokigahara Sea of Trees or Jukai. It is a mixed forest comprising both conifers such as Japanese Hemlock and Japanese Cypress and broadleaf trees such as Mongolian oak, where we can observe such aspect of precious forest peculiar to Fujisan of a young volcano that trees desperately root on slight soil in the lava crack and over moss covered fallen trees.



Lake Shojiko



Lake Motosuko



“Aokigahara Jukai” Forest

## 2. History of Fujisan Worship

### Period of veneration from afar

Since Fujisan was repeatedly erupting in ancient times, people worshipped the deities of Fujisan from afar. The time from the end of the Nara period (710-784) through the Heian period (794-1185) is seemed to have been an active period for the Fuji volcanic belt.

The biggest eruption in ancient times was the one started in 864. As the eruption was from Mt. Nagao (1,424m in altitude), a parasitic volcano near the 1st station of the Shoji ascending route, it was on the Kai province side situated north of Fujisan.

According to the report from Suruga province (present-day Shizuoka Prefecture) at the time, the lava flow reached the border with Kai province (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). On the other hand, the report from Kai province stated that the lava flow buried both Lake Motosuko and Lake Senoumi, all fish and turtles died, and it flowed further east to Lake Kawaguchiko while causing enormous damage to people and houses in the area.



Yamamiya Sengen-jinja Shrine

### Beginning of Worship-Ascents

As volcanic eruptions subsided, people began ascending Fujisan to worship the deities. Making worship-ascent of sacred mountains like Fujisan is called “Zenjou”, and it was “Shugenja”, practitioners of Shugendō sect, who centered it around. (\* Shugendō is a sect of a syncretism of ancient Japanese mountain worship and esoteric Buddhism.) As eruptions subsided, ordinary people guided by Sendatsu (leaders) actively made worship-ascents of the mountain.

The boundary, the worship area of Fujisan is corresponding to the flora and the way of nature on the mountain as well. It is represented in three spaces of “Kusayama san-ri” for the grass mountain area, “Kiyama san-ri” for the wooded area, and “Yakeyama san-ri” for the bare ground where no vegetation exists. (\* san-ri; ri is an old metric used in East Asia. 1 ri is 3.9km. San is three in number.)

Suwanomori, in which Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine is enshrined, is a forest of Japanese red pine planted in the Edo period (1603-1868). The area from outside of Suwanomori to Nakanochaya (literally, tea house, served as a rest house for climbers) to Umagaeshi (literally, horse’s return, meaning the limit of ascent on horseback) is “Kusayama” and there are groves of Fuji Zakura (Fuji Cherry Blossoms) and Japanese Azalea around Nakanochaya.

Beyond Umagaeshi is “Kiyama”. The area is surrounded by a primeval forest of Japanese larch, Tsuga diversifolia, fir and so on where roots of trees, rocks and scattered religious remains are covered with moss, thus we can taste the mood held in the bosom of Fujisan. As coming closer to the 5th station called “Tenchinosakai” (the boundary between Heaven and Earth), the trees get lower and it changes to a landscape peculiar to the forest limit. The 5th station and above where reddish brown mountain’s surface is exposed is called “Yakeyama” (literally, burnt mountain).

Enshrined are Suzuhara Dainichi Buddha on the boundary between Kusayama and Kiyama, and Omuro Sengen-jinja Shrine in nearby Omuro. At “Tenchinosakai”, the boundary between Kiyama and Yakeyama, Chugu Shrine and Chugu Dainichi Buddha are enshrined, and Asama Daibosatsu (Buddha-to-be) and its Buddhist deity of origin, Dainichi Nyorai Buddha, were dedicated there. Oikiai to converge with the Subashiri ascending route is the 8th station (original 8th station). Above Oikiai is considered to be a divine land overseen by Fujisan Hongu Sengen Taisha Shrine.



North Gate Map of Fujisan

### Rise of Fuji-ko

It was necessary for those who worship Fujisan and desire to ascend it to prepare travel expense. Therefore, they collected some money every month together with their companions and organized a group called “Ko”, which conducted a lottery to choose representatives who make a worship climbing to Fujisan. That is Fuji-ko, Fuji pilgrimage association.

Hasegawa Kakugyo (1541-1646) who emerged around the end of the Warring States period (1467-1600), one of the Shugendō practitioners, preached that this world and humans originated from its creator, that is, Fujisan is the god of origin, and laid the foundation of Fuji-ko of recent times by responding to the requests of worldly benefits from the common people from Edo (present-day Tokyo) and its surroundings.

After that, the spirit of Kakugyo was handed down to the subsequent generations of disciples such as Murakami Kosei (1682-1759) and Jikigyo Miroku (1671-1733) in the middle of the Edo period (1603-1868).

After Miroku passed away in the religious training attempting to “fall into deep meditation” at the Eboshiwa Rock, the number of Fuji-ko followers drastically increased. In late Edo period, there were so many Fuji-ko groups founded as to say “Edo is wide enough to accommodate eight hundred and eight towns, and in the eight hundred and eight towns as many as eight hundred and eight Fuji-ko groups exist”.

Yoshida developed to a great extent as the center of Fujisan worship, where 86 “Oshi” lodging houses existed throughout the Edo period. Fujisan has been visited by many Fuji-ko followers from the Edo period through today.



Fuji-ko followers in the present day

### Doctrine of Fuji-ko

For the people making worship ascents of Fujisan, the world on the mountaintop was perceived as the “other world” (the world after death). Ascending Fujisan was considered part of training and experience of a symbolic death. Descending from there was considered a spiritual rebirth.

Therefore, they wore white attire for religious training. It is the same single suit as the one worn for journey to death, of which fitting to the left front, and also making the knot in a granny knot. When entering the sacred world, the zone of the “other world” from the “secular world” of everyday life, it was necessary to get prepared and practiced for that. First of all, it was necessary to purify their minds and bodies by conducting multiple ablutions at the essential points such as the entrance of spiritual mountains, rivers, lakes and ponds at the foot of the mountain.



Fugaku Sanju-rokkei by Katsushika Hokusai “Groups of Mountain Climbers”

“Otainai” (Funatsu lava tree molds) was also one of such spiritual sites. Tainai (tree molds) is indicated as a group of caves of lava tree molds among the groups of lava caves formed in association with eruptions of Fujisan. As the inside of the caves resembles the shape of womb, those were viewed as sacred sites by Fujiko followers, thus the religious practice of making a circuit inside the caves called “Otainaikuguri” (literally, touring inside the body) was conducted. Regarded going through inside the caves as a birth, it was believed they could be born again by conducting “Otainaikuguri”.



Funatsu lava tree molds

### Beginning of Circuit Pilgrimage

As “go around” worship, influenced by Fuji-ko followers, was considered as a form of new religious training, such trainings as “Ochudo” (pilgrimage route around Fujisan’s slope) and “Uchihakkai-meguri” (making a circuit of the inner eight seas) came to be conducted in addition to “Ohachiyo-meguri” (making a circuit of the crater wall peaks).

The religious training to make a circuit of the summit called “O-hachi-meguri” (hachi means bowl) in the present day, in the sense of going around the bowl shaped crater wall, was once called “O-hachi-yo-meguri”. (hachi-yo means eight petals).

Also called “Ochudo” is the route to make a circuit of Fujisan slope. The most difficult point on the route is “Osawa collapse”, and the word of “do” (it means cross over) for “Ochudo” was used as it is a hard training of crossing over the collapse.



“O-hachi-meguri” pilgrim circuit

“Uchihakkai” (the inner eight seas) is a generic name for Lake Asumiko, Lake Shibireko, and Lake Sudoko in addition to the Fuji Five Lakes (Yamanakako, Kawaguchiko, Saiko, Shojiko, and Motosuko), and water ablation to make a pilgrimage to these lakes is “Uchihakkai-meguri” (making a circuit of the inner eight seas). “Oshino Hakkai” is considered a site where water ablation came to be conducted in its eight springs found in Oshino Village as aggregating the pilgrimage of making a circuit of the inner eight seas.



Oshino Hakkai springs (Shobuike pond)

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