**Pilgrim Towns: Kawaguchi and Yoshida**

In the second half of the fifteenth century, a growing stream of pilgrims began arriving at Mt. Fuji. Kawaguchi and Yoshida were two areas at the north foot of the mountain that developed to meet the spiritual and practical needs of these visitors.

Kawaguchi, on the northern shore of Lake Kawaguchiko, was already an established station on the Kai Road that connected Kai Province (modern-day Yamanashi Prefecture) to the provinces of Suruga and Sagami (modern-day Shizuoka and Kanagawa prefectures) south of the mountain. For Fuji-bound pilgrims traveling this route, Kawaguchi was a welcome place to rest after climbing Misaka Pass, the last major pass before Mt. Fuji came into view. A small community of *oshi,* priests who offered guidance to pilgrims visiting Mt. Fuji, arose to serve these travelers. By the sixteenth century, these *oshi* were traveling across the entire country to spread the Fuji faith.

A relatively small number of pilgrims used Kawaguchi as the base for their climb. Most began from Yoshida, the “gateway to Mt. Fuji,” where *oshi* began offering accommodation to pilgrims in the sixteenth century. The town’s current location dates to 1572. To avoid the danger of rocks and debris tumbling down the mountain during spring melt, residents established a new main street 500 meters to the west of Yoshida’s original location. The new main street was oriented directly toward the mountain and lined with *oshi* lodging houses. At its peak, Yoshida was home to over 80 *oshi* offering accommodation to pilgrims. The subsequent decline of Fuji-ko membership, however, meant fewer *oshi* were needed, and only a handful of the former lodging houses are still standing today.