

## Takadachi

Takadachi is a ridge with a sweeping view of the Koromo and Kitakami rivers and Mt. Tabashine to the east. It is known as a former residence of Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–1189), perhaps Japan's most famous samurai, and the place where he met his fate. At the top of the ridge is Takadachi Gikeidō, a small shrine dating to 1683 that houses a statue of Yoshitsune.

After Yoshitsune's father and two oldest brothers were killed in the Heiji Rebellion of 1160, he lived at Kurama Temple near Kyoto. In 1174, a gold merchant took Yoshitsune to Hiraizumi, where he lived for six years under the protection of Hidehira, the third Fujiwara lord.

Yoshitsune, both an accomplished warrior and a skilled military tactician, later helped lead the Minamoto clan to victory against the Taira clan in the Genpei War (1180–1185). His success incited the jealousy of his half-brother Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), forcing Yoshitsune to flee Kyoto in 1185. He made his way to Hiraizumi once again to live under Hidehira's protection. However, Hidehira died soon after Yoshitsune's arrival. Hidehira's son Yasuhira (1155–1189) bowed to pressure from Yoritomo and attacked Yoshitsune's residence at Koromogawa-no-tachi. Yasuhira defeated Yoshitsune's followers, including his retainer Musashibo Benkei (1155–1189), a warrior-monk of legendary strength. Yoshitsune committed suicide rather than be killed by a warrior of inferior status.

Yoshitsune's exploits have been celebrated in Japanese literature, retold in poetry, *noh* and *kabuki* plays, as well as modern-day manga comics, novels, and TV dramas. Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), regarded as one of the greatest Japanese haiku poets, visited Takadachi to pay tribute to Yoshitsune. He departed Edo (present-day Tokyo) in spring 1689 and spent more than two and a half years traveling. He composed a travelogue in *haibun*, a mixture of prose and verse, entitled *Oku no hosomichi*, or *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. When he arrived at Hiraizumi, exactly 500 years after the death of Yoshitsune, he was struck by the city's lost glory. At Takadachi, he wrote:

The glory of the three generations of the Fujiwara family passed away like a snatch of empty dream... Indeed, many a feat of chivalrous valor was repeated here during the short span of the three generations, but both the actors and the deeds have long been dead and passed into oblivion. When a country is defeated, there remain only mountains and rivers, and on a ruined castle in spring only grasses thrive. I sat down on my hat and wept bitterly till I almost forgot time.

(Translated by Nitobe Inazō)

A poem was ended his description:

Summer grasses—  
all that remains  
of the warriors' dreams.