

“Opening” the Mountain

The July start of Mt. Fuji’s climbing season is marked by ceremonies known as *oyamabiraki* or *kaizansai*, both of which mean “opening the mountain.” The ceremonies are both a celebration of the end of the freezing, dangerous winter conditions and prayers for the safety of the 20,000 or more climbers who will make the ascent over the following two months.

Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-Jinja Shrine: Opening the Yoshida Trail

The ceremony at Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja Shrine is held at the gate where the Yoshida Trail to the peak begins. A special *omichibiraki* (“way-opening”) ritual is held on the evening of June 30. After a procession led by the priests passes through a special *chinowa* ring made of cogon grass that is suspended before the prayer hall (*haiden*), a worshipper dressed as Tajikarao no Mikoto, a deity known for his sheer strength, swings a heavy hammer to sever the ceremonial rope tied across the trail gate. The head priest passes through the gate, followed by other priests and Fujiko pilgrims, and the mountain is declared “open” for another season. An additional ceremony is held in front of the *honden* (sanctuary building) the following morning.

Komitake-jinja Shrine: Tengu Descend from the Mountain

The ceremony at Komitake-jinja Shrine is similar to the one at Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen-jinja, but here the honors are handled not by a deity but by two *tengu*, part-avian beings said to live on mountains and possess great spiritual power. These are the traditional attendants (*kenzoku*) of the shrine, and they “open” Mt. Fuji by cutting a rope across the torii gate with an enormous axe.