

## **Shibokusa Sengen-jinja Shrine**

The Sengen shrine in Shibokusa, Oshino, was founded in 807 and moved to its current location in 1186. In 1193, the Kamakura shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo granted the shrine a domain reaching as far as Toriichi Pass to the north. Today the shrine is closely linked to the Oshino Hakkai Springs, which were developed by parishioners in the nineteenth century.

A large number of ancient Japanese yews (*ichii*) grow on the shrine's precincts. These range from 1.4 to 3.7 meters in circumference; some have grown into distinctive "husband-and-wife" pairs.

### **A Trio of Statues**

Among the shrine's treasures are three wooden statues dating to 1315. One is a female figure now considered to be an image of the Sengen goddess Konohanasakuya-hime. Scholars believe that the trio may have been carved to represent Princess Kaguya and two of her suitors from the ancient "Tale of the Bamboo Cutter." In this story, Princess Kaguya is a celestial beauty who is endlessly courted by suitors, including a completely besotted emperor. Rejecting them all, she eventually returns to the moon, leaving only an elixir of immortality behind. The grieving emperor orders the elixir burned at the peak of Mt. Fuji, as it is the closest mountain to heaven. This, goes the legend, is the origin of the name "Fuji," coming from *fushi*, the Japanese word for immortality.