

### **Kasagi Pass**

This mountain pass played an important part in the survival of the Koyasan community, as the steep slopes and forests and the cold climate of higher altitudes were not conducive to food cultivation. In the years before the mountain roads to Koyasan were paved, pilgrims (and people making deliveries) had no choice but to ascend via narrow paths like the Choishi Michi (Stone Marker Trail).

Kasagi Pass was an important stop on the route, and residents from the nearby village of Kasagi would offer their services as porters and guides to carry daily necessities and offerings. As the trails were too narrow for pack animals, everything had to be brought up on foot. This included the huge blocks of stone used to construct graves, pillars, and masonry. Though they weighed several tons, each one of the *choishi* stone pillars that mark the trail was reverently carried to its current location by pilgrims and porters.

While it must have been backbreaking work, the effort of bringing goods, offerings, and even stones to Koyasan was deeply significant to believers as a way to express devotion to the priest Kukai (known posthumously as Kobo Daishi; 774–835), the founder of Koyasan.